

Chair and Members of the Agricultural Committee  
European Parliament  
60 rue Wiertz  
B-1047 Brussels

Brussels, 20 March 2012

Dear Chairman Paolo De Castro,  
Dear Members of the Agriculture Committee in the European Parliament,

**Subject: New CAP should address EU protein deficit and support local protein production**

Most of the concerns expressed in the European Parliament own-initiative resolution<sup>1</sup> of 4<sup>th</sup> February 2011 on “The EU protein deficit: what solutions for a long-standing problem?” are shared by a large and growing series of stakeholders, including agricultural unions, environmental and development organisations and scientists from diverse backgrounds. The signatories of this letter regret that the problem of protein dependency of the European Union remained totally absent in the European Commission proposals to reform the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). We therefore urge the Agricultural Committee of the European Parliament to insist in this consultation stage of the CAP legislative proposals on the demands expressed in its resolution to include protein crops in new policy measures and instruments to support farmers in improving crop rotation systems.

Currently, about 70% of protein crops consumed in Europe are imported. This import corresponds to 20 million ha of arable land outside the EU, of which the majority are soy monocultures inflicting social and ecological damage in South America. Also in Europe there are compelling economic and ecological reasons to decrease protein dependency. We argue for the reintroduction of protein crops in the EU. Historically they constituted 15% of European farmland and are now reduced to just 3% or one million ha. We are convinced that the increase of leguminous crop production can contribute to the goals set in the EU 2020 Strategies. Below, we list the most important benefits of enhanced protein crop production in the EU, many of which are recognised in the aforementioned EP resolution.

**Economic benefits**

The ability of leguminous crops to fix atmospheric nitrogen allows to cut crop production costs significantly due to a reduced need for chemical fertilizers and tillage. A GL-Pro<sup>2</sup> study of 2006 conducted in several regions of five EU countries pointed out that overall the inclusion of grain legumes in crop rotation increased gross margins. A joint European Parliament and French government study<sup>3</sup> estimated the cost reduction on fertilizers in France at 100 million euro per year. A recent scientific advice to the Dutch government<sup>4</sup> on the vulnerability of European agriculture stated that “the best prevention against soy scarcity for the EU is to start growing more protein- rich animal feed”. It would make European farmers less vulnerable to market volatility and rising energy prices.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//NONSGML+REPORT+A7-2011-0026+0+DOC+PDF+V0//EN>

<sup>2</sup>GL-Pro is the 5<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme Thematic Network "European extension network for the development of grain legumes production in the EU"

<sup>3</sup>See resolution p.13 (PE 438.591)

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.platformis.nl/adviezen/Beleidsdocument-compleet-web.pdf>

### **Agronomic benefits**

A study commissioned by DG Environment<sup>5</sup> showed that legumes help to maintain or improve soil structure and fertility and provide the necessary nutrients for subsequent crops in the rotation. As also recognised in the EP resolution a higher ratio of leguminous crops in the rotation reduces soil acidification, enhances disease resistance of plants, controls weeds and improves pollination through greater biodiversity, all these effects resulting in long term improvement of crop yields and land fertility

### **Environmental benefits**

These economic and agronomic benefits would also increase the environmental performance of European agriculture. As pointed out in the European Nitrogen Assessment<sup>6</sup>, greater nitrogen use efficiency directly and indirectly reduces energy use and agricultural greenhouse gas emissions. Reduced use of fertilizers and plant protection products can significantly improve environmental quality of water bodies. Moreover, leguminous crops provide a habitat for many pollinators that are now under threat in Europe.

The signatories of this letter believe that an increased production of protein crops in the EU has the potential to increase competitiveness and environmental performance, including climate change mitigation, of the European agricultural sector. These are stated major goals of the CAP 2014-2020 and other European policies.

We call for:

- support for protein crop production in the EU (as part of the 'greening' under the first pillar, or otherwise);
- new funds to be allocated to research and development to fully exploit the potential of protein production on European soil.

An increased production of protein crops in the EU delivers economic, agronomic and environmental services that deserve your support. We thank you to take these concerns seriously.

Yours sincerely,

Wervel vzw and the co-signatories

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<sup>5</sup> A summary of this Bio Intelligence Service study can be found at:  
[http://ec.europa.eu/environment/agriculture/pdf/BIO\\_crop\\_rotations%20final%20report\\_rev%20executive%20summary\\_.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/agriculture/pdf/BIO_crop_rotations%20final%20report_rev%20executive%20summary_.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.nine-esf.org/>

Initiator:



[www.wervel.be](http://www.wervel.be)

Co-signing organisations:



<http://aardeboerconsument.nl>



<http://www.absvzw.be/>



<http://www.vacvzw.be/>



<http://www.foeurope.org/>



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<http://www.ifoam-eu.org>



[www.viacampesina.at/](http://www.viacampesina.at/)



<http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/>



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