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CEPF position paper on the future Common Agricultural Policy – Trigger the full potential of forestry

Importance of forestry in the Common Agricultural Policy and its Rural Development Policy

The Confederation of European Forest Owners (CEPF), representing the interests of Europe's millions of private forest owners, welcomes the public debate on the future Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and seeks to actively engage in the discussion on behalf of its 23 European member organizations.

CEPF emphasizes that the CAP must remain a top priority of EU policies due to its importance for economic, social and environmental development. Furthermore, CEPF emphasizes the importance of the Rural Development Policy in the CAP, pointing to the need for a much higher level role of rural development in general and forestry in particular in the new CAP. In this context CEPF welcomes the Cork 2.0 Declaration as an important commitment to ensure sustainable and viable rural areas, highlighting the potential of rural areas to deliver solutions to societal challenges, with forestry as an engine of rural growth.

Sustainable forestry plays a crucial role to deliver solutions to meet some of the most complex challenges facing society today, particularly with respect to the new international commitments on climate change and sustainable development. Forests play a prominent role in the Paris Agreement on climate change and is inherently a part of most, if not all, of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations.

Europe's forest owners are not only part of the solution to these challenges, they are needed to meet them. Therefore, CEPF is convinced that a stronger political recognition and integrity of the forestry sector in the future CAP is required. The CAP should be designed to promote and ensure an economically viable, competitive forestry sector, which is a prerequisite for the sustainable development of the environmental and social functions of forestry in Europe's rural areas. Balancing all three pillars of the sustainability – economic, environment, social – is at the core of daily sustainable forest management (SFM).

Sustainably managed forests deliver a multitude of benefits, both for rural areas and society at large. While providing the largest non-food renewable resource for a sustainable bioeconomy, rural growth and around 4 million green jobs in forestry and related industries, Europe's forests deliver multiple ecosystem services, biodiversity and recreation areas for society. Especially in rural areas forests play a crucial and multifunctional role, while contributing to the socio-economic well-being and therefore maintaining rural areas viable and populated.

The fact is that 43% of the EU land area is covered with forests, covering a slightly greater proportion of the land that is used for agriculture. Thus, forestry is crucial for land use and the management of natural resources in the EU's rural areas. 60% of the forests are in the private ownership of some 16 million European citizens. All in all, forest owners are an indispensable part of viable rural areas and at the same time forest owners are representing a large share of European society.



What is needed from the future CAP Rural Development Policy

The Rural Development Policy under the CAP has to clearly aim at increasing the activities in and the development of the rural areas, thereby increasing the attractiveness of rural areas and the number of people that are able to live and work in them.

This means that the Rural Development Policy must provide the right tools for forest owners and managers. Support of forestry measures with attractive payment levels fostering the economic prosperity of forestry, reflecting the long production period of forestry, focused on actively, sustainably managed forests, “climate fit forests”, and forests contributing to developing the bioeconomy and delivering ecosystem services and biodiversity, has to be central element in the Rural Development Policy.

The importance of EU funding for forests and the forest sector under the Rural Development Policy is not only endorsed by the new EU Forest Strategy, but also crucial for the contribution of the implementation of the Strategy.

Therefore, to trigger the full potential of forestry in meeting the overarching targets, CEPF calls for following points to be addressed in the future CAP and Rural Development Policy:

1. Securing adequate funding for private forest owners

A substantial budget allocated to the forestry sector and therewith an adequate funding for private forest owners and forestry measures under the Rural Development Policy is needed. The current level of funding must be maintained or increased to tap into the full potential of the forestry sector to deliver solutions to current and future societal challenges.

2. Simplification

The CAP must be simplified in terms of bureaucratic requirements to be more attractive for forest owners and to be efficient with a minimum of administrative burden, not to hamper the successful implementation of the policy. A more user friendly CAP and Rural Development Policy with simpler application, administration and inspection processes is needed, linked to measures that are appealing to beneficiaries and better respond to the challenges of the forest sector in general. In order to simplify the CAP, lump sum payments should be taken into account.

3. Support for forest owner associations and overcoming structural disadvantages

Appropriate and further improved funding options for forest owner associations and other forest owner groupings with SME status is needed to maintain and develop rural areas, whilst using and mobilising wood as a renewable resource. In terms of mobilisation of wood from small-scale forest holdings, the grouping of small forest owners into cooperatives and producer groups has to be further improved to overcome structural disadvantages.

4. Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation

Supporting measures addressing climate change mitigation and adaptation through sustainable forest management is essential to meet the targets of the EU climate and energy policy and implement the Paris Agreement. This includes increasing forest stand viability and productivity and the use of biomass for renewable materials and energy. The adaptation of forests to climate change is one of the challenges that has to be tackled in the new Rural Development Policy.

5. Risk management in forestry – climate change induced catastrophes

Europe's forests are increasingly threatened by climate-change induced catastrophes, such as forest fires, storms and pests, and globalization induced impacts like invasive species. The Rural Development Policy must take into account the importance of risk management in forestry and establish efficient risk management instruments aligned with forest owners and manager's needs.

6. Bioeconomy

The new CAP has to better promote the circular, green and fossil-free bioeconomy and the transition to a bioeconomy as opportunities for rural development. The substitution of fossil-based materials and the increase of biomass mobilisation and better use of co- and by- products, plus support of the use of biomass for renewable energy and bio-based products are crucial. In this context, measures to develop and strengthen forestry value chains are also needed.

7. Biodiversity

Forestry must remain eligible to receive support to halt biodiversity loss. Thus the Rural Development Policy should support forest owners when engaging into nature and environmental services, with financially attractive environment programmes related to Natura 2000 payments, forest-environment payments, first afforestation and the restoration of forest productive potential, especially when it increases biodiversity.

8. Ecosystem services

Forests in Europe provide multiple benefits for society in terms of ecosystem services. However, the provision of public goods and services from forestry is in many cases not adequately accounted for. The new CAP and Rural Development Policy should support and promote ecosystem services and develop measures for payments for ecosystem services.

9. Knowledge transfer and advisory services

The integration of the forest sector in knowledge transfer, informative actions, advisory services and cooperation is essential in further strengthening the implementation of sustainable forest management, securing wood mobilisation and improving the provision and marketing of ecosystem services.

10. Innovation

It is the forest owners' conviction that Europe needs an innovative forestry sector. Supporting measures regarding innovation is needed, since innovation is a key element for the forestry sector to enhance sustainability, bioeconomy, biodiversity and to tackle climate change. In this context digitisation plays an important role and is an opportunity for the forest sector. To support the process of innovation, financial support to adapt sustainable management practices and to invest is needed, along with advisory services and vocational training to implement innovation in the best way.

The Confederation of European Forest Owners (CEPF) is the umbrella association of national forest owner organisations in Europe. Representing family forestry in Europe, CEPF promotes the values of sustainable forest management, private property ownership and the economic viability of the forest sector. Based in Brussels, CEPF is a non-profit organisation, representing nearly 16 million forest owners. These are private individuals, families and cooperatives, which take care of approximately 60% of the European forest area.

For further information please visit: <http://www.cepf-eu.org/>