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*Brussels,
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Dear Mr Schmidt,

Thank you for your letter of 19th January 2023, and for the associated outcome document of the third Youth Climate and Sustainability Round Table on Food security and sustainable food systems. The Commission services have taken due note of the positions expressed in the document and of the useful information provided.

*The Commission takes the issue of **generational renewal** in farming very seriously. In their Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) Strategic Plans for the period 2023-2027, Member States went beyond the minimum requirement of dedicating at least the 3% equivalent of their direct payments envelope to generational renewal. Overall, a total of €8.5 billion of public spending will help young farmers set up, invest and develop their business in their first years of activity. The Commission will closely monitor the evolution in the number and age of EU farmers and evaluate the performance of the CAP with regard to attract more young and new farmers in the future.*

***Information to beneficiaries** about CAP funding opportunities is under the responsibility of the Member States managing authorities. As laid down in Articles 112 and 113 of the CAP strategic plans regulation¹, Member States must establish national CAP networks, with the objective to contribute to the information of potential beneficiaries on the CAP and funding opportunities. The CAP supports Member States in establishing and operating the national CAP networks through the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). In addition, the EU accompany Member States in their efforts through the European CAP Network².*

¹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021R2115&from=EN>

² https://eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu/index_en

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Education is a competence that is fully in the hands of Member States. Nevertheless, the EU is supporting skills development and sharing of good practices in order to address the challenges of the green and digital transitions. On November 24th 2022, the Commission organized the conference “Farming’s got talent! Vocational education and training for agriculture in transition”. This event brought together teachers, students, training providers and other EU and national level actors to highlight the role vocational education and training (VET) can play to support the farming sector in the twin transition. The Commission will continue to exchange with the relevant stakeholders in 2023 in the frame of the European year of skills³.

Climate action is at the heart of the EU Green Deal, and there is a growing demand for agriculture to decrease emissions and improve its environmental performance. The CAP 2023-2027 has been built around three **sustainability objectives** (economic, social and environmental). Area-based payments, decoupled from production, have been historically set to support farmers’ income more efficiently, while cross-compliance in the past, and enhanced set of conditionalities in the future ensures that beneficiaries respect high EU standards for public, plant, and animal health and welfare. The report assessing the performance of the CAP 2014-2020⁴ shows that basic payments provide an extensive level of environmental protection and are not an incentive to increase production intensity. Land-based payments are relevant for a number of practices reducing emissions, including extensive livestock grazing and permanent grassland, support to nitrogen-fixing crops, protection of soil carbon stocks, reduction of fertilizer use, and support to organic farming. However, the report also shows that further efforts are still needed to incentivize a broader change in agricultural practices. The new “green architecture” of the CAP for the period 2023-2027 has increased both the ambition and consistency of CAP support to environment and climate. In the livestock sector, the use of feed additives can contribute to reduced emissions and the Effort Sharing Regulation⁵ sets targets per Member State to reduce GHG emissions, including from agriculture. The EU is also encouraging carbon farming⁶ to further incentivize farmers to adopt climate-friendly practices. Finally, for the CAP 2023-2027, a more performance-based policy has been designed. Through the new performance monitoring and evaluation framework⁷, a set of indicators has been defined to improve the assessment of the policy against all sustainability dimensions.

I fully share your concern about the importance of **preserving our agricultural land**. This is why a study on land use, mandated by DG AGRI, will begin in 2023 to provide a sound and comprehensive analysis of the main impacts of sectoral developments (agricultural, forestry, energy, nature conservation, urban sprawl, climate action, mining, etc.) on land use in the EU’s rural areas. In addition, land use is closely linked to soil health. Following the publication of the EU soil strategy⁸ on 17 November 2021, the Commission is preparing a proposal for Soil Health Law to restore soil health, ensure the sustainable use of soil, and reduce net land take. This proposal is expected for 2023.

³ [European Year of Skills 2023 \(europa.eu\)](https://european-council.europa.eu/media/e300042f-323d-4f40-b0f1-6b8f0223d31c/jcms/jcms_72482/en/european-year-of-skills-2023)

⁴ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52021DC0815&from=EN>

⁵ [EUR-Lex - 52021PC0555 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52021PC0555&from=EN)

⁶ [Carbon Farming \(europa.eu\)](https://europa.eu/european-council/en/carbon-farming)

⁷ [CMEF \(europa.eu\)](https://europa.eu/european-council/en/cmf)

⁸ https://environment.ec.europa.eu/publications/eu-soil-strategy-2030_en

*Finally, agriculture is linked to food systems. As regards **local food**, the new CAP contains means to support short food supply chains without impairing the single market or the rules of the World Trade Organisation. A balance between short/local chains on the one hand and longer ones on the other, is an asset to ensure diversity of food supplies and the resilience of our food system. In parallel, the Commission is working on several initiatives, including a Framework Law for Sustainable Food Systems, to increase the overall sustainability of the EU food system. In particular, the proposal for the Framework Law, which is expected for Q3 2023, will include provisions for sustainable public procurement, including by setting sustainability criteria on the three dimensions of sustainability.*

Yours sincerely,



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