Ms Ursula von der Leyen  
President of the European Commission

Dear President,

in recent days, I have held many meetings with farmers taking part in agricultural protests, as well as with representatives of agricultural organizations from the Baltic states, Italy, Portugal, Spain, and the Visegrad Group countries. The aim of these meetings was to discuss the causes of agricultural protests currently taking place in many European Union countries - and how to address these causes.

In addition to national issues, which vary between Member States, these meetings and conversations highlighted two groups of issues relating to EU policy:

- agricultural imports: notably those from Ukraine, which pose a threat to European farmers, but also those from the MERCOSUR region or Morocco, which are produced to lower standards than ours; and

- administrative burdens arising from the Green Deal.

The views of our farmers vis-à-vis these two issues are very firmly held, and can be summarized as follows: stop imports, Green Deal out!

Regarding imports from Ukraine, I have presented my views clearly and consistently. I believe these imports should be limited, while at the same time offering our full support for the transport of Ukrainian grain via seaports and its onward export to markets outside the EU.

Regarding the Green Deal, farmers appreciate the derogation already introduced by the Commission from the obligation to keep 4% of land fallow, and the withdrawal of the legislative proposal to limit pesticide use, but at the same time they point out that these are temporary and insufficient solutions.
According to our farmers, the Green Deal would not present such a big problem if it were not for the market destabilization caused by imports from Ukraine. It is difficult to disagree with this perspective, considering that the underlying policy assumptions for Green Deal agricultural aspects and CAP reform were made before Russia’s aggression against Ukraine. Clearly, the effects of this aggression on the agricultural sector were not taken into account.

In such an unstable market, with falling prices and income volatility, farmers across the EU are unable to plan agricultural activities normally on their farms. Therefore, our actions to support them should go much further than those undertaken so far.

Let me briefly recall the proposals for additional action I have submitted:

1) to temporarily waive (for year 2024) penalties for farmers who do not meet the requirements of conditionality, in particular GAEC 1 (restoration of permanent grasslands), GAEC 6 (soil cover in sensitive periods), GAEC 7 (obligatory crop rotation) and GAEC 8 (keeping 4% of agricultural land fallow);

Implementing the above measures does not require legislative changes, just a signal to Member States that market destabilization caused by Russia’s aggression may be treated as an "extraordinary circumstance" within the meaning of Art. 3 of EU Regulation 2116/2021 on the financing of the Common Agricultural Policy.

2) to allow Member States to increase their direct payments for 2023 by 10% in the framework of "war" public aid, thus responding to the inflation of prices caused by the Russian war;

3) to extend the temporary crisis framework for public aid for agriculture, which expires in June 2024, for another year, until June 2025; and

4) to send a clear signal of trust - to both Member States and farmers - that farmers will not have to submit any technical or other evidence of carrying out the work required for conditionality or eco-schemes (e.g. so-called geotagged photos), and that farmers’ declarations for doing this work would be sufficient. Control and verification of these declarations would be the responsibility of national administrations.

Such a proposal does not require legislative changes in 2024 - an interpretative indication from the Commission is sufficient. However for 2025, changes to EU implementing regulations would be required, which can be implemented by then.

I would like to add a fifth proposal to the ones already submitted above - simplifying eco-schemes.

I propose that farmers be presented with options for a simplified eco-scheme, consisting in the proposed list of good agricultural practices, such as: 1) mixing straw with soil, 2) using manure, 3) sowing catch crops, 4) no-plough cultivation, 5) extensive grazing on permanent grasslands, 6) cultivation of melliferous plants, 7) biological plant protection.

The farmer could choose at least two of the above practices, affecting at least half of utilized agricultural land, and then obtain the right to a lump sum payment for the simplified eco-scheme. The amount of this payment would have to be calculated and proposed by the Member States.
A farmer wishing to benefit from payments for eco-schemes would have a choice - to use the current eco-scheme system, specified in individual national CAP Strategic Plans, or to withdraw from this system and join the simplified eco-scheme as outlined above.

The proposal does not require legislative changes in EU law, only changes to the strategic plans of individual countries approved by the Commission, in the manner already provided for in EU Regulation 2115/2021 regarding CAP Strategic Plans. It is possible that Member States would have to amend their national legislation.

Based on my conversations and consultations with farmers, I have the impression that both the changes I proposed earlier and the last one are well received by farmers and can contribute to reducing the tension, and at the same time they do not contradict the needs in the field of the environment and climate.

Yours sincerely,

Janusz Wojciechowski

C.c.: Mr Björn Seibert, Head of Cabinet of the President
       Mr Wolfgang Burtscher, Director General of DG AGRI