



To: European Parliament Committees on Agriculture and Rural Development (AGRI), and Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI)

Cc: European Commission President-elect Dr. Ursula von der Leyen, Executive Vice-President-designate Frans Timmermans, Executive Vice-President-Designate Valdis Dombrovskis, Commissioner-designate Virginijus Sinkevičius, Commissioner-designate Janusz Wojciechowski

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OPEN LETTER

RE: Reform the CAP: harmful agriculture is destroying nature

Dear Members of the European Parliament,

You have the power to decide the fate of Europe's nature. We are scientists from all EU member states and beyond. We are observing bird, mammal, reptile, amphibian and insect populations suffering catastrophic declines due to harmful agricultural practices throughout Europe. We urge you to act on the science, and undertake a far-reaching reform of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) without delay.

The CAP has led to an intensification of agricultural practices, including landscape simplification and consolidation, drastic increases in the use of pesticides and mowing frequency, irrigation expansion and the destruction of pasture lands. The unequivocal scientific consensus is that in concert these activities have led to a decline of European farmland bird populations of more than 55% between 1980 and 2015, and a decline of insect population abundance of more than 76 % in a study of 63 nature reserves in Germany between 1989 and 2016. These declines are linked, and are pushing the remaining populations to critical levels. This further exposes the populations to additional threats such as the illegal killing of birds during migration and in wintering grounds. Similar trends are being experienced by other animal and plant groups which depend on farmland habitats in Europe.

The CAP is turning rural areas into green deserts of uninhabitable maximum-yield monocultures. The greening measures within Pillar 1 of the CAP are largely ineffective at retaining or restoring biodiversity and are too often poorly controlled. The current agri-environmental schemes are both underfunded and insufficiently targeted to meet the scale of the damage to farmland biodiversity. In-depth analyses also show that the proposal made by the Commission for the CAP post-2020 fails to offer a real reform, and



even risks lower ambition. Without a fundamental reform of the CAP, such negative trends will not only diminish nature in current EU member states but will also threaten the nature of candidate ones. EU membership should not be causing silent springs.

A reform of the CAP must deliver sustainable and diversified agriculture through spatially-targeted measures supporting smaller farms which carry out sustainable farming and maintain high nature value farmland. Models show that if implemented correctly, such measures could contribute to the recovery of biodiversity and rural human populations. These benefits can be reached by truly aligning a future CAP with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, SDGs. For example, specific funding for biodiversity on farms can make extensive grazing a viable and competitive option for livestock farmers.

The scientific evidence is clear that climate change and biodiversity loss need to be tackled as an utmost priority if the EU is to uphold the main goal of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development. The EU must be a pioneer in responding to these challenges and the CAP must be part of that response rather than continuing being the cause of greater environmental degradation.

We are ready to support you in devising solutions as outlined above. Please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours sincerely,

European Ornithologists Union

Jan-Åke Nilsson, President | Barbara Helm, Past President | Alfonso Marzal, President Elect

European Mammal Foundation

Tony Mitchell-Jones, Chairman

Societas Europaea Herpetologica

Mathieu Denoël, President

Societas Europaea Lepidopterologica

Erik J. van Nieuwerkerken, President | Marianne Espeland, General Secretary

Butterfly Conservation Europe

Chris van Swaay, Chairman

European Bird Census Council

Mark Eaton, Chairman