



Position paper 2020

Topic: Youth participation in agriculture

“Once in your life you need a doctor, a lawyer, a policeman and a preacher but every day, three times a day, you need a farmer.”

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1. Summary:

The current paper is a short note on youth participation in agriculture. The following points are discussed in this paper: why it is important to have active youth participation in the field, what are the current issues and obstacles for young people engaged in agriculture, what MIJARC Europe suggests to do and already does itself, what recommendations and demands MIJARC Europe has to the stakeholders in this field.

2. Introduction

Youth participation has been defined by the member organisations of MIJARC Europe as “*taking part in the life of the community, work as a volunteer, take responsibility, organise projects and demonstrations in order to build a better society*”¹. As an organisation uniting rural and agricultural youth from 14 organisations all around Europe, we are concerned about youth participation especially in the field of agriculture, agricultural policies, and policies for rural development.

Why do we care about this subject at all? Because beyond the obvious importance of youth in the future of the planet and the food system and beyond the significant place that we would like agriculture to take in the social agenda, we have the ultimate goal to make rural areas no longer a place that youth must leave to make a living and have a job but a place where we grow up, where we live, where we work and where we **stay**.

We have chosen to organise our thinking according to the "See. Judge. Act" method, developed by Joseph Cardijn within the framework of the Social Doctrine of the Church.

The SEE part is the perception and study of real problems and their causes, the analysis of which falls within the competence of the human and social sciences.

In the JUDGE part we ask ourselves what we feel and think about the situation described, what we think the reality should be in comparison.

Ultimately, in the ACT part, we seek to bridge this described reality and the one we would like to

¹ MIJARC Europe (2019), *Report on the state of youth participation*

create, we propose actions to do so and strive to include other instances than ourselves in these actions.

We have organised our remarks around the various accesses we would like to open up to young people in order to enable them to be more involved in agriculture and agricultural policies, namely access to information and education, to political discussions and to the functioning of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

3. ACCESS TO EDUCATION & INFORMATION

SEE

Education

Despite many efforts to improve access to education in rural areas, the gap with urban areas is still sorely felt. According to Eurostat figures, while 50% of city dwellers aged between 30 and 34 have a tertiary degree, this is the case for only 28.4% of those living in the countryside. Similarly, the rate of young people dropping out of school along the way is higher in rural areas than in urban areas (8.1% versus 6.3%), even if these figures are to be taken cautiously as the gap between eastern and western countries is very wide here.

As a consequence of the lack of education, young people from rural areas experience a higher rate of unemployment and non-enrolment (the average in the EU is 17.5% in rural areas compared to 14.2% in cities but the gap is sometimes much wider, like in Bulgaria where there is a share of 42% of youth unemployment in rural areas against 12% in cities).² Education is an absolutely essential tool for reducing inequalities and improving the living conditions of people in rural areas. According to a FAO report, a farmer with four years of elementary education is, on average, 8.7% more productive than a farmer with no education.³ These figures prove that rural development cannot take place without strong access to education.

² Eurostat (2019), Statistics on rural areas in the EU, In Eurostat regional yearbook

³ Gasperini, *Education for Rural People as a component of a Rural Development Strategy for Croatia* FAO, April 2003

Information

Access to information is recognised as a right insofar as it is necessary for citizens to be able to participate in the different levels of democratic life of their country or at European level. Today, the majority of young people have access to information through the Internet. However, people living in rural areas have significantly less access to the Internet than those living in urban areas. Eurostat figures show that 62% of city dwellers have digital skills (from basic to expert) compared to only 48% of rural dwellers.

JUDGE

While we think it is good and important to perpetuate the tradition of agricultural knowledge handed over from generation to generation, we feel it is essential to ensure modern means of learning because agriculture evolves over time and young people need all the innovative tools they can get.

Being a farmer is difficult, not only because of the whole physical work it requires, but also because it is multi-faceted. An uneducated farmer, for example, will find it very difficult to cope with the amount of administrative work that awaits him or her. And if they cannot manage their own, they will have to employ accountants and other administrative trades to help themselves, leaving a portion of their mostly already low income behind.

Similarly, for non-farming youth, it is important to give them some form of knowledge about the food system, otherwise they will never be able to grasp the challenges facing the farming world.

The classic pattern that is played out in all rural areas is that of young people leaving their native countryside to study in the city, since it is difficult to obtain a degree in rural areas. Agriculture, and all related disciplines such as the study of rural development or agronomy, should be available for studying in the geographical area of which they relate.

ACT

Education in rural areas needs to be made more relevant by, for example, including agriculture in primary and secondary school curricula or modernizing the existing agricultural curricula. Agricultural education and training must reflect the needs of the agricultural labour market and enhance the familiarity of young women and men with the world of work, including its practical challenges and rewards. Agriculture should be a field of study as valued and rewarding as any other. We must foster the positive image and acceptance of agriculture so that more young people are attracted to the job.

At MIJARC Europe we set up projects in order to familiarise young people with agriculture:

- a. farm visits with young people
- b. informative seminars and camps dedicated to youth participation
- c. awareness-raising online campaign “Grow it yourself”
- d. engaging youth from rural areas in our educational projects

We know that the young people who participate in these projects are happy and proud to have a better grasp of the subject of agriculture, which for many of them is the profession of certain members of their family or at least close to their social circle.

4. ACCESS TO POLICY DIALOGUE

SEE

Young people's desire to get involved

In a survey on the views of young people on the EU, it is stated that most of them “*are actively engaged and show interest in current social and political issues*” and that “*voting in local, national or European elections is the most common social, political or civic activity followed by getting informed on current issues and volunteering.*”⁴ Participating in political processes or civic

⁴ Flash Eurobarometer 478 (April 2019), How do we build a stronger, more united Europe? The views of young people

consultations is not proposed as an option. To “being active in a student or youth organisation”, 41% answered yes and to “participating in political movements, parties or unions”, only 15% did so.

Their lack of knowledge and low visibility

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is the main political frame for agriculture and rural development in the European Union. In 2018, according to a survey of European citizens⁵ “more than two thirds (67%) of respondents have heard of the support the EU gives farmers through the CAP: 10% know the details, while 57% have heard of it but don’t really know the details. Almost one third (32%) have never heard of it.” We might find these figures satisfactory but when it comes to age, we realize that young people are much less aware of this topic. 46% of people aged 15-24 have already heard of the CAP but do not really know how it works whereas 52% have never heard of it.

Youth participation is recognized to have an important role in decision-making and policy dialogue to work not *for* but *with* youth⁶. It is recognized by the European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life and the 9th goal of the EU Youth Strategy named “space and participation for all”. And yet, the lack of information and figures on the participation of young people in agricultural policies is striking. While the issue of rural youth and young farmers is slowly beginning to attract attention, there is no information on how young people can participate in policies that aim to fix the system that feeds them and energize the rural environments in which they live. There are no figures besides very few examples of meetings held with young people, most of the time initiated by rural youth organisations. And we are not just talking for the EU in general, but for each individual EU country.

Pope Francis' call to young people with the Laudato Si

In the agricultural field, Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si*, in the chapter on pollution, denounces

⁵ Special Eurobarometer 473 (2018), Europeans, Agriculture and the CAP, Survey requested by the European Commission

⁶ FAO (2014), *Youth and agriculture: Key challenges and concrete solutions*, In collaboration with the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), Rome.

the “fertilizers, insecticides, fungicides, herbicides and agrottoxins in general”⁷. With the Encyclical *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis reminds us of the importance of young people in the processes of transition towards a more environmentally friendly agriculture: “young people have a new ecological sensitivity and a generous spirit, and some of them are making admirable efforts to protect the environment. At the same time, they have grown up in a milieu of extreme consumerism and affluence which makes it difficult to develop other habits. We are faced with an educational challenge”.

JUDGE

At MIJARC Europe, we agree with Pope Francis’ statement in the encyclical *Laudato Si* as he says “Young people demand change. They wonder how anyone can claim to be building a better future without thinking of the environmental crisis and the sufferings of the excluded.” We are convinced that young people do not only *ask* for change but want to actively *contribute* to this change. We believe that it is the duty of the decision-making institutions to give them the room and to provide them with the tools to do so. Rural popular education movements all over Europe contribute to this objective.

And when we give voice to young people, they put words to some fundamentals that we tend to forget. In 2019, during a local visit we organised in Germany, we asked young participants (aged between 15 and 22) to tell us what they thought would happen if there was no youth participation in policies. Their answers actually surprised us. They told us that if we did not immediately give them the tools to understand how policies worked, then they would never get them because their adult lives would probably not give them the time or the desire to learn more about it. So, they would never invest in their lives as citizens, would never run for mayor or other positions that would give them an ability to invest in society. In addition to their obvious desire to understand and participate, they are aware of the stakes that the functioning of policies represents for their future and that of

⁷ Pope Francis (2015), *Encyclical letter Laudato Si, on care of our common home*, Vatican Press

society.

ACT

Make room for youth organisations

We are grateful to the Catholic Church for offering spaces for young people to think, speak out and be empowered while also promoting diverse and inclusive spaces for political reflection for young people. The movements that operate in rural areas often bring together sons and daughters of farmers, whether or not they intend to follow their parents' footsteps, and give them all rare opportunities to address agricultural and environmental issues through activities that relate to the way of living they are familiar with.

We, at MIJARC Europe, are trying to meet this educational challenge Pope Francis referred to in the Encyclical *Laudato Si*, particularly with our activities to help young people become better informed about how to participate in agricultural policies. Governing institutions, the Catholic Church, popular education movements and youth organisations all have a role to play in promoting youth participation in agricultural policies. Through their projects and activities, they have access to information, but above all they have privileged access to rural and agricultural youth, to their demands and desires. It is necessary to take them more into account in reflection and decision-making bodies.

Focus more on rural areas in terms of surveys and research

Surveys and opinion polls commissioned by the European Commission or the Council of Europe help us a great deal in our work because they enable us to gain a better understanding of the problems with the help of official statistics. However, we need to find more studies on the rural world. Indeed, when a survey is made on a subject concerning youth (education, political participation, civic life...) it is too rare for the population to be targeted. It is often the youth in general, apart from young people from rural areas who often do not have access to the same type of schooling or information as those from urban areas.

Similarly, the links between the EU and young people should be closer, to ensure better communication and, thus, better knowledge among young people of the workings of the EU. Each

new generation is part of a stronger Europe, where links between countries are more tenuous. If we want them to feel fully European citizens, we need to give them better access to the means at their disposal to invest in this citizenship, in particular by giving them an opportunity to participate in politics. On national levels, Member State governments should work towards more transparency on how the EU works, so that citizens are less intimidated by the EU.

Empowering rural youth

At MIJARC Europe, we are doing our best to develop awareness of young people about the possibilities of youth participation and we are empowering them to use these opportunities.

We are strengthening rural youth organisations across Europe as not everyone is a born leader; we need organisations to represent us⁸. Plus, we know that we are stronger together, all united by our rural origins, our interest in agriculture and environmental issues, and our commitment of giving young people a voice.

As a rural youth organisation, our role is to strengthen youth participation in the areas where our members live and work. By empowering rural youth, we make sure that their ideas for improving rural life are not left behind. We know that they are the future of our countryside and their beliefs and ideas are relevant. Rural areas are facing challenges common to the urban places but also very specific ones. Only if rural youth are involved in the agricultural and rural development policies, rural areas will answer the challenges of the 21st century.

5. ACCESS TO THE CAP AND ITS FUNCTIONING

Agricultural production is characterised by long-term processes of food production. Therefore, short-term legal decisions are critically discussed by the agricultural industry. Some of the topics often discussed include: the design of financial support for individual farms, bureaucratic

⁸ FAO (2014), *Youth and agriculture: Key challenges and concrete solutions*, In collaboration with the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), Rome.

developments, planning reliability and technological progress.

In the following, the above-mentioned topics will be discussed in more detail, undesirable developments will be pointed out and possible solutions will be proposed.

SEE

Organisation of the CAP budget

The amount of the CAP, that is the budget reserved by the EU for agriculture was €58.82 billion for the 2014-2020 period. Out of this amount, €41.74 billion (around 71% of the agricultural budget) is used for income support for farmers and €14.37 billion (around 24% of the agricultural budget) goes for rural development.

This organisation of finances corresponds to the organisation of the CAP, which is based on two pillars, the first pillar concerning aid to farmers, while the second aims at supporting rural areas in their economic, environmental, and social challenges.

Low incomes for farmers

One of the biggest challenges facing agriculture in the EU today is the low wages of farmers. While there are huge disparities between European countries in terms of average farm size and land value, even the countries with the most developed agriculture and which receive the most support from the CAP are in great difficulty. France, Europe's leading agricultural producer, is experiencing the biggest decline in agricultural production in the EU and in 2016, around 30% of French farmers had an income below €350 per month, less than a third of the minimum wage.⁹

The crisis of overproduction

The other major challenge we wish to address is that of overproduction. The two agricultural sectors most affected are milk and pork. By 2016 milk production in Europe had increased by 5.6% and pig production by 23%. Yet if subsidies are granted to support the income of farmers facing a crisis of overproduction but the amounts of subsidies are calculated on the volumes produced, the public

⁹ Céline Schmitt. "Revenu des agriculteurs : les raisons de la colère", *touteurope.eu* 8 February 2018

authorities aggravate the crisis they wish to address by encouraging producers to produce more in order to receive more aid.

Bureaucracy

According to a 2016 survey, farmers spend about 5 to 10 hours a week on paperwork, adding to an already busy schedule, as the average work week for a farmer is about 50 hours.¹⁰

The first pillar has a comprehensive set of rules, which makes the gap more difficult for farmers to understand and significantly increases the organisational burden on Member States. The extensive verification, reporting and control obligations of the IACS (Integrated Administration and Control System) Regulation are the reason why farmers consider the CAP Reform to be too complicated and bureaucratic. For example, the application and documentation requirements associated with the implementation of greening are causing farmers a great deal of extra work.

Uncertain future

The stakes of the CAP are such that it is becoming a bone of contention for the Member States, and the negotiations that provide for each new period are often bitter. Many different interests are put forward and we rarely know which decision will remain in the future. The policy is a bit changeable, but this is enough to make farmers insecure, so that no big purchases are made. Farmers can no longer rely on the decisions of the CAP or are insufficiently informed.

JUDGE

Not enough aid for small farms and young farmers

In 2015, 1.5% of beneficiaries received more than 30% of the total amount of CAP aid. Many small farmers suffer from this poor distribution of aid. Indeed, the "decoupled" aid from the first pillar goes to larger farms, regardless of what they produce and how they produce it. This, therefore, favours large cereal farms to the detriment of market gardening farms, for example. This is a long-standing problem which the EU has tried to solve many times, but without any real success despite

¹⁰ Pierre Boiteau. "Temps de travail des agriculteurs : La paperasse alourdit des semaines déjà bien chargées", *terre-net.fr*, 4 December 2016

some improvements.

We are in favour of a system that aims at having a great respect for the environment and supports farmers to be able to contribute to this aim. Moreover, it is very important for us that the system especially supports family farming.

Even though setting-up aids for young farmers have existed since 1980, they are not enough to convince young people to turn to farming. Between 2007 and 2013, around 190,000 young farmers have benefited from this aid, but around 3.5 million farmers over 65 years of age will retire in the next few years.¹¹ Most of these future retirees work on small or medium-sized farms and they have no one to take over.

The fight against overproduction is unsatisfactory

In some regions, the overproduction of food is detrimental to the environment in the long term. It is, for example, the case in pig farming. The various measures that have been taken to counter this phenomenon, such as quotas, often run counter to the interests of farmers and make their lives even more difficult. It is time to consider a reform of the CAP that will not encourage mass production.

Young people are cautious

If it is still not possible to generate planning security, farmers will no longer be able to orientate their business in a forward-looking manner and planning errors will occur. A farm is often managed over generations and no one wants to leave a lost farm to their children. Young people who want to get into farming are hesitant and we understand that.

ACT

The current CAP supports young people with about 2% of its budget which is simply not enough, as young farmers are the present and the future of the European agriculture. We must ensure more funding, but also that the arrangements for aid to young farmers are consistent with national laws

¹¹ Pour une autre PAC (2019), *Atlas de la PAC, Chiffres et enjeux de la Politique Agricole Commune*, p.23

on the transfer of farms.

The issue of farmers being overburdened with too much red tape is related to the issue of access to education and technology. We need to ensure that farmers are not lost in the process.

The alarming decline in the number of small farms in Europe (disappearance of 96% of them between 2003 and 2013¹²) must be stopped. We must stop encouraging the specialisation of farms, which leads by a knock-on effect to even larger farms and which makes it difficult for young farmers wishing to set up in business to find land. The acquisition of agricultural land should be a possibility for everyone and not a luxury for a small number of farmers. When we organise our local visits as part of our work plan, we try to introduce young people to a large diversity of farming. This is what we consider the future of agriculture.

6. CONCLUSION

We do not have a fantasised, bucolic image of the countryside. Yes, we consider that agriculture is essential for the environment, for the landscape and for humanity but we are rooted in this reality of the rural environment because we grew up there, we could see what it lacks and we decided to invest ourselves in MIJARC Europe to try to change what needs to be changed.

If we really had to fantasise about a rural environment, it would be an area that young people did not have to leave in order to study and work, and where they could fully invest themselves in what is its driving force and had to remain so: agriculture. Rather than feeling increasingly remote and unconcerned by the decisions that are taken for them at national and European level, we want to see young people being actors in agricultural policies, aware of the issues at stake for present and future generations.

¹² Pour une autre PAC, *Atlas de la PAC*, p.22

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