More than 31% of all farms in the EU are run by farmers older than 65, whilst young farmers represent only 6% of European agricultural community. Reversing this trend is one of the toughest challenges for the main EU farming policy.

Generational renewal is, indeed, one of the post-2020 Common agriculture policy (CAP)’s nine objectives in the European Commission’s proposal presented on June 2018.

Income support but also measures facilitating access to land and land transfers are among the main young farmer’s demands.

Understanding their claims is particularly valuable, as all the hardships young farmers have to face today can give a sneak peek of what the future of agriculture will look like.

This Special Report is available in the following languages: English, French, German, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, Croatian.
Profitability, land and passion for the countryside: the magic triangle of agriculture’s generational renewal

Keeping young farmers in rural areas is the biggest challenge for Croatia

Italy’s young farmers: Networking to make revenues

‘Rejuvenated and professionalised’, Alentejo wine sector wants to be known worldwide

Land speculation squeezes out young farmers in East Germany

‘Burdensome administration’ means young farmers are missing out on EU subsidies

France’s young farmers are struggling to establish themselves
In Spain and across the European Union, more than 90% of farmers are close to the retirement age, meaning that the problem of generational renewal poses a serious problem. Finding a solution depends on the combination of a magical triangle: access to land, profitability and passion for the countryside. EURACTIV’s partner EFEAGRO reports.

To make agriculture attractive to young people again, it would be essential to combine factors, including the inheritance of family business, the facilitation of establishing an agribusiness, securing fair prices and public aid (among them, subsidies of the CAP), as well as a great deal of passion for the primary sector, experts told EFE Agro.

In 2015, according to the final results of a survey conducted for the European Commission (among more than 2,000 farmers under-40), access to land was a “considerable” concern.

It is “very difficult” for “someone who does not inherit (a farm, for example) or does not have production elements to start an agricultural activity”, stressed Agustín Herrero, the

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general director at Cooperativas Agro-Alimentarias de España. The situation has considerably deteriorated with the current situation of low profitability, he says.

**PROFITABILITY, AN ESSENTIAL FACTOR**

After graduating in Environmental Sciences, farmer Juan Escribano (35) returned to his hometown, Villanueva de Córdoba (Andalusia, south), to take over the family livestock farm and the local ham marketing company.

“Starting this activity from scratch was very complicated. If you don’t already have the fundamentals, it is almost impossible”, he told EFE Agro.

Profitability is essential to move forward and the agricultural sector is not an exception to that universal rule of the economy.

Farmer Agustín Herrero stressed that the first measure and “perhaps the most difficult” to ensure a generational renewal in the agricultural sector is to meet the basic conditions that would allow farmers to make a living out of the countryside.

“Nobody considers building a life in an area that has a scarce production, which makes it almost impossible to live in”, he stressed.

**IS THE HELP FROM THE CAP ENOUGH?**

The big challenge - he says - is to ensure the food chain generates enough value and is distributed fairly, and also to have key national and community regulatory measures.

“Without [financial] help, [agriculture] is not profitable,” according to Pilar Mateos, a farmer in Argamasilla de Alba (Ciudad Real, centre of Spain), adding that many agrifood products are “worth little”.

Mateos thinks that financial help from the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is essential, but also criticised the “small amounts” that come with this EU aid. It is “not enough” - in many cases - to keep a good standard of living.

A passion for agriculture is also an essential part of the “virtuous circle”, Escribano said.

Escribano and Mateos share the same passion for agriculture and agrifood production. For both, livestock, vineyards and olive trees form a key part of their daily life’s landscape.

Thanks to their devotion to agriculture, the heavy burden of their daily work feels slightly lighter. “I enjoy being in the countryside, it is a way of conciliation between work and family life.”

“I often take my two children with me, so they can have direct contact with animals,” Escribano explained.

Cooperatives are key when it comes to facilitating the daily work, face difficulties and curb market crises in the agricultural sector.

**THE IMPORTANCE OF COOPERATIVES FOR THE SECTOR**

Cooperatives and associations of farmers are an example of deep-rooted union in the agricultural sector and help overcome the lack of young people that severely impacts the sector, according to the general director of Agro-food Cooperatives.

Pilar Mateos is conscious of how supportive the Federation of Women and Families of the Rural Area (Amfar, in Spanish) continues to be for the sector. Amfar, she told EFE Agro, guided her in the implementation of agricultural programmes and provided her with valuable information on financial help for the agricultural sector in Spain.

Juan Escribano, head of the livestock sector in the Agroganadera Fair of the Valley of the Pedroches, also appreciates the importance of cooperatives.

The Agroganadera Fair of the Valley of the Pedroches is a Spanish consortium of public and private entities. Every year, the consortium joins efforts to highlight the value of the primary sector for the local economy.

The EU’s agricultural sector needs young people to secure its future, which should be based on a more sustainable, healthy and safe food production.

The challenge is to achieve the formula that perfectly combines these stimuli, which enable access to land, profitability and passion to make European agriculture shine again.

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Keeping young farmers in rural areas is the biggest challenge for Croatia

By Karla Juničić | EURACTIV.hr

Generational renewal of Croatian agriculture is a slow process burdened with negative demographic trends, constant migration and a non-competitive market. EURACTIV Croatia reports.

Despite the popularisation of European funds, which boost positive development, many other policies which can encourage young people to remain in rural areas are still lagging behind.

In Croatia, young farmers are considered to be holders of family farms until they reach the age of 40. Year by year, young farmers are increasing in numbers, although growth is still slow. According to the farmers register’s figures, there were a total of 22,351 young farmers in 2018, which is 13% of the total number of farmers enrolled.

At first glance, funds may be a good incentive for young people to engage in agriculture and remain in rural areas, but the problem of generational renewal is much more complex. [Cropix / Euractiv.hr] [Tomislav Kristo]

Figures from the country’s farmers register show a 4.3% increase, compared to 2017, which also saw a 3.8% compared to 2016.

The generational gap is obvious, since more than 50% of agricultural holders are over 60 years old. However, the share of young farmers puts Croatia high at the EU level, averaging at 6 percent.

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According to the World Bank report on the state of Croatian agriculture, access to the EU labour market and the ongoing structural transformation of the agri-food sector have led to significant migration from rural areas, especially among young people, which has in turn reduced the availability of labour.

Croatia’s Ministry of Agriculture introduced a series of measures to encourage young people to remain in rural areas and engage in agriculture. Total allocation for the 2014-2020 Rural Development Programme amounts to €2.3 billion, of which €2 billion comes from the European Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD).

Although a large number of tenders have been launched in recent years to take advantage of the 16 measures envisaged by the programme, the funds are still underused. So far, 97% of the funds (€2.5 billion) have been made available through tenders, 71% (€1.73 billion) contracted and 41% (€1 billion) have been disbursed.

Various measures have also attracted young people, with measures 4 and 6 being the most interesting ones. Young people in measure 6 have access to the sub-measure 6.1.1 which is intended exclusively for farmers under 40 years of age and co-finances 50% of their activities. Through sub-measure 4.1, young people receive 20% more support – co-financing their project by 70%. So far, 1,489 projects of young farmers worth HRK 512 million have been contracted under measure 6.

COMPLEXITY OF THE PROBLEM

At first glance, funds may be a good incentive for young people to engage in agriculture and remain in rural areas, but the problem of generational renewal is much more complex. The process of generational renewal is slow and is, for the most part, the result of the closure of smaller, non-competitive holdings, which were mainly run by older farmers, Dr Ornella Mikuš from the Faculty of Agriculture in Zagreb told Euractiv.hr.

According to her, the main obstacles stopping more young people from entering the sector is the fact that the “funds cannot solve the issue. It is the task of domestic agricultural and other policies (demographic, educational, social).” Market uncertainty and the non-competitiveness of products is a concern for most farmers.

Following a request by Euractiv.hr, Josip Vrbanek, member of the Croatian Chamber of Agriculture and a consultant, highlighted the problem of poor organisation and poor connectivity of young producers, as well as the small number of associations, cooperatives and producer organisations.

“Given the great changes in the market economy in Croatia in the last few decades [the breakup of Yugoslavia and the entry into the EU market], our manufacturers need to react quickly and one of the models of success is certainly association. One of the main obstacles is weak producer activity in this area, as well as a lack of mutual trust,” he added.

FEAR OF BUDGET CUTS

Currently, Croatia is nearing the end of the Rural Development Programme’s seven-year period (2014-2020), so the funds in these measures have been largely utilised. And questions about budget cuts raise many concerns and disagreements.

On Sunday (3 November), representatives of several agricultural associations warned that the reduction of the agricultural budget, as foreseen in the draft budget of the Republic of Croatia for 2020, will contribute to the further decline of the sector.

President of the Croatian Independent Farmers Association, Mato Milinarić, warned that Croatian farmers are being asked to be competitive, while they receive 20% less support than European farmers.

Also, the Croatian Chamber of Agriculture expressed its concerns on budget on Monday (4 November).

Agriculture Minister Marija Vučković responded to the complaints, saying that information on reducing direct payments to farmers was not correct, adding that farmer subsidies had never been higher and highlighting the positive results of measure 6 as an example.

European rural development funds are currently the main contributors to Croatia’s agriculture sector. Deficiencies in implementing the structural policy of generational renewal in rural areas, which would ensure future agricultural production and food supply in Croatia, will surely affect development inequalities in the European Union.

Specifically, in the case of budget cuts in the 2021-2027 programming period, support for all Croatian agriculture would be reduced and limited, making Croatia even less competitive and profitable on the market, since the country was last to join the EU and withdrew the least amount of funds accordingly.
Italy’s young farmers: Networking to make revenues

By Tommaso Cinquemani | Agronotizie

The number of young people entering the agriculture sector is increasing, but there are many problems to be addressed. Networking is a good way to overcome them. EURACTIV’s partner Agronotizie reports.

Young Italians also dream of becoming farmers, not just football players and top models. Numbers are clear: with over 55,000 farms led by under-35s, Italy ranks first in Europe for employing young people in the agriculture sector, who range from farmers’ children who inherited to young people who, for the love of nature, embarked on the adventure.

According to data from Coldiretti, the main Italian farmer association, young farmers are familiar with new technologies, are used to travel and have a particular focus on environmental and social protection. One of four young farmers is a woman with a degree.

However, there is a big difference between farmers, who decide to start a new business and those that inherit the land from their family, which are in the majority. The first Group Co of people with heterogeneous qualifications; they have a business plan and clear ideas.

The main obstacle is access to credit. In Sardinia, the price of one hectare of land is around €17,000 and in Liguria it is €108,000, meaning that in a place like the Langhe, one hectare of vineyard can cost millions. [EPA-EFE/ABBATE]

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in Liguria it is €108,000, meaning that in a place like the Langhe, one hectare of vineyard can cost millions. But the funds made available by the EU and the Italian government often make the problem less insurmountable.

THE ROLE OF EDUCATION

According to Coldiretti, this year, 22,000 young people under-40 applied for the ‘first settlement subsidy’ in Southern Italy but 78% of the applications were not accepted due to administrative delays.

Therefore, the risk is that the EU funds linked to the 2014-2020 rural development programmes will go back to Brussels.

“An enormous damage to a territory that is already in difficulty” denounces Confagricoltura, the other big farmer association, which blames bureaucracy and the regional administrations.

Most of the youngsters who study agriculture, however, are sons and daughters of farmers, who will one day inherit the family business. In the 2017-2018 school year, 45,566 young people chose to take an academic course in agriculture.

According to the survey carried out among students by AgroInnovation EDU (an educational program sponsored by Image Line), it is clear that modern farmers will need weather stations (52.1%), web apps for managing field operations (51.1%), GPS (47%) and sensors (45.1%), as well as search engines for crop protection products and fertilisers (39.4%), drones (33.7%) and robots (10.5%).

However, it is not easy to complete this generational change. “Young farmers nowadays are on their own and very often, even if prepared from an academic point of view, they are not able to make the difference in the company. In the end, it is the elderly father who decides, even if the son is the owner on paper,” Giuseppe Savino, founder of VàZapp, told AgroNotizie.

THE IMPORTANCE OF NETWORKING

VàZapp’ is an association of farmers created in Puglia, in the South of Italy. The association allows farmers to meet, exchange and share good practices.

The idea for the association came from Giuseppe Savino and Don Michele De Paolis, a priest, who died at 93. Both saw the land as a source of work and not as a cause of emigration to the North.

“First of all, we listen. I myself am a farmer and I know that farmers today feel alone and unheard. This is why we invented the ‘Contadinner’. It is basically dinners organised at the farmers home, where everyone is free to exchange ideas, problems and visions”, explained Savino.

The key is to network. For small farmers, creating communities is necessary to survive. It means sharing good agronomic practices, but also equipment. For example, why should one farmer cover the costs of a tractor when these can be shared with a neighbouring farmer? And by sharing the tractor, a centralised warehouse could be used to prevent theft.

“Young farmers have a different attitude, and they would like to change the way they do farming, but often they don’t know-how. They feel isolated,” Savino confided. The founder of VàZapp took over the family business, which produces cereals, grapes and olive oil in Foggia, Puglia.

According to VàZapp’s vision, farmers are not just the people who feed humanity every day; they can also be therapists.

“Citizens flee to the countryside to seek beauty, tranquillity, a slower pace of life. Farmers can become custodians of the landscape and create those relationships that all people need,” he added. After the human connection, an economic one flourishes, which then translates in the direct sale of the products of the earth.

Finally, what could also attract young people to the countryside, are experiences. Today thousands of people go to the countryside to participate in the grape or olive harvest and the cheese preparation. In the new millennium, food is no longer good to satisfy a primary need, but a source of experiences capable of nourishing the soul.
‘Rejuvenated and professionalised’, Alentejo wine sector wants to be known worldwide

By Rita Ranhola | Lusa.pt

The Alentejo wine sector, the market leader in Portugal, sells four in ten bottles on the Portuguese market. It has become professional and ‘rejuvenated’ in recent decades and aims to be recognised worldwide, a regional representative told EURACTIV’s partner Lusa.

However, despite this positive trend, the sector has to assert itself more in terms of exports and prices, Francisco Mateus, president of the Alentejo Regional Winemaking Commission (CVRA) said. The CVRA is the body that certifies, controls and protects Alentejo and Regional Alentejo Denominação de Origem Controlada (DOC) wines.

“We have been growing in the region, in the context of agri-foodstuffs, and has been growing”, CVRA’s president added.

“The way in which consumers accepted the wines from the Alentejo in the first years of the 1990s had to do with some technological revolution” in the region and “the Alentejo, in 30 years, has almost rejuvenated itself”, he went on to say.

“People with a very professional vision and young people with training and experience in other parts of the
world have joined the profession”, he said.

“There are many people working in Alentejo today who have studied outside Portugal or had professional experiences outside the country and, therefore, come with more ‘world’ experience and that’s good. We’re more open to innovation”, he explained.

**SUSTAINABLE RESTRUCTURING**

The Alentejo Wine Sustainability Programme (PSVA), a pioneering initiative in Portugal promoted by the CVRA (although it exists in other parts of the world), is one of the examples of how innovation has marked the region.

Launched in 2015, the programme started with 94 members and now has 386. João Barroso, who leads the PSVA, told Lusa that the programme aimed at grape and wine producers in the region, but also involves networks with research institutions, higher education, regional and national bodies, among others.

The voluntary PSVA encourages good environmental and sustainable practices in vineyards and wineries. Besides, it was recently one of the 15 winners of the LIAISON Project 2019 European Rural Innovation Competition, which is part of the European Commission's European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability (EIP-AGRI).

Alentejo producers have also been paying attention to the European Union and are taking advantage of EU support to improve their facilities and their product.

“There has been an investment in the modernisation of wineries and European funds have been important”, Francisco Mateus said, exemplifying that aid has been used “for marketing” and “promotion abroad”, helping wineries to “penetrate the markets and go to fairs”.

The vineyard restructuring programme has been “a very important milestone”. Between 2000 and 2017, overall Community aid of €137 million was approved for Alentejo, corresponding to “some €200 million invested in the land”, he stressed, adding that the vine areas approved for restructuring were “around 17,000 hectares, from 2000 to the 2017/2018 campaign”.

In 2018, Alentejo produced “107 million litres of wine”, registering “a better year than the previous one”, since “2017 was the culmination of three years of successive decline in production”, due to the drought.

**FROM PORTUGAL TO THE WORLD**

This year, production should not “come close to that figure”, due to the lack of rain, he admitted. But as he is convinced by the wine’s quality, he added that “the producers report that we will have an excellent year”.

According to data from the Institute of Vine and Wine (IVV) in 2018, almost 21,962 hectares of the 24,544 hectares of vineyards in Alentejo are registered with the CVRA, which is far more than just 30 years ago.

“As time went by, it became an asset to be able to use the name Alentejo,” Mateus added. The region “has led the market share for many years” in Portugal, the main destination for its wines.

“We have almost 40% of the market share of certified wines, which is very good” and, in 2018, the average price was “above the national average,” said CVRA’s president.

Alentejo exports “have been relatively stable” and, on average, between 2015 and 2018, sold almost 20 million litres of wine abroad. The average turnover for Alentejo wine exports reached €62.3 million.

The region’s main export destination remains Europe if one counts it as a whole. But when it comes to individual countries, Angola, Brazil, the United States and Switzerland rank among the biggest export destinations, Mateus added.

What Alentejo still lacks is “generating more monetary value” with its wine and “taking the ‘leap’ to export more wine, by diversifying the range of countries to which it sells the product,” he said.

The CVRA’s president, who recognised that “it’s a job that never ends”, stated that the body’s ambition is to “make the Alentejo a recognised wine region in Europe and worldwide".
In East Germany, young farmers are finding it increasingly difficult to purchase land because major investors are not acquiring land for agricultural purposes and because former GDR cooperatives are being privatised. EURACTIV Germany reports.

It is not a high-quality land on which the farmers of the Bienenwerder farm in East Berlin are growing vegetables. Not only is the soil in East Brandenburg sandy, but the two previous summers also brought drought.

And yet Julia Bar-Tal is proud of what she and the farm collective have created in this area. They now cultivate ecological vegetables across 45.5 hectares and sell over 40 different crops to shops in Berlin.

There is a great deal of work involved at the organic farm, where the farmers work the soil with horses and ponies instead of tractors to preserve it.

The fact that Bar-Tal even owns 45 hectares is due to her ancestry. Her grandmother owned land in the northwest of Brandenburg, which was expropriated in the GDR.

This gave her granddaughter a right of first refusal, enabling her to acquire most of her arable land at a preferential price.

"This was just family luck. For many other young farmers, there simply is no chance of obtaining land, no matter how educated they are,” explained Bar-Tal.

This is because the land prices have exploded in the last 15 years. According to the official figures of the state government, the cost of one hectare of land in Brandenburg...
averaged €2,500 in 2004. But by 2017, the figure had risen to over €11,000. The reason for this is a price spiral that began a few years after German reunification.

**EXPENSIVE LAND**

With the end of the GDR, the large, state-owned agricultural production cooperatives were dismantled and privatised piece by piece. To this day, the federal Bodenverwertungs- und Verwaltungs-GmbH (BVVG), which is Germany’s soil processing and administration company, is responsible for this.

The sale of large areas of land soon attracted supra-regional investors with no agricultural background but speculated on rising land prices.

The price per hectare has now reached astronomical heights. A glance at the BVVG database shows purchases of over €26,000 per hectare in the region where the Bienenwerder farm is located.

“Land prices here have increasingly been dissociated from what can be generated from agriculture,” Julia Bar-Tal said.

As a result, farms are eventually out of business, meaning it automatically goes into an area where people with non-agricultural capital invest. “It is a virtual increase in value that no longer corresponds to reality,” she added.

Immediately after the reunification, land could still be leased at affordable prices, which was mainly done by large agricultural cooperatives.

Nowadays, however, lease periods are shorter, and extremely substantial capital is required when establishing a farm.

Since the land is the basis for any investment in the future, the establishment of a farm represents an enormous risk if it is not secured in the long term.

“If you want to start a farm, you need a high willingness to take risks, as well as insane idealism,” said Bar-Tal.

**THE PROBLEM OF PUBLIC TENDERS**

The trained organic farmer is very concerned with the BVVG’s land allocation practice because land plots are awarded in public tenders in which anyone can submit a single bid. And no one knows who else is bidding or the value of the other bids.

“If these are areas on which your livelihood depends and you don’t know who else is bidding, then, of course, you are bidding high,” she said.

According to the BVVG, this system is as transparent as possible. If the bids were made public, then the prices would rise even higher.

Besides, there are so-called limited invitations to tender, which are explicitly aimed at young or organic farmers to promote them. And 80% of the land allocated by the BVVG goes to regional farmers.

But the big investors don’t even buy land directly.

Instead, they buy up agricultural cooperatives and thus legally become regional farmers who are allowed to participate in the tenders.

Benjamin Meise has first-hand experience when it comes to the uselessness of the limited tenders for younger farmers. Meise runs a conventional farm near the Bienenwerder farm, of which 1,500 of 3,500 hectares are leased from the BVVG.

When 350 hectares were released for a limited tender, he wanted to bid but the minimum price quoted was far too high. As the land was excellent, the farmer kept 70 hectares of it at “supra-regional prices”, he said.

**DROUGHTS, BREXIT AND REDUCED DIRECT EU PAYMENTS**

“But as a result, we had to part with employees and sell machines. Because of the droughts, Brexit and possibly falling direct payments from the EU, however, Meise expects land prices to fall again.

“They have reached their peak,” he added.

Because they do not want to wait for this to happen by itself, trainees and young farmers in the region have been organising themselves in the “Bündnis Junge Landwirtschaft” for several years.

By protesting, they may bring these ‘land-grabbing’ practices, which large investors commit to, to the attention of the public and force the current land assignment practice to change. Julia Bar-Tal is also part of it.

At the very least, she would like to see a discussion on whether Brandenburg’s land should be sold at all. Alternatively, she could imagine a capping of the purchase and lease amounts, as is the case in France.

“Then the deal would become much less attractive for investors,” she said.
Young farmers accessing land via non-conventional contracts are eligible for EU subsidies, according to the European Commission. But in practice, burdensome administrative constraints often outweigh any financial advantage, meaning that landowners are cashing in while young farmers are missing out.

Lack of access to affordable land for new farmers is widely recognised as the largest obstacle to new farming entrants.

Most of Europe’s agricultural land is in the hands of greying farmers: more than half of farmland is managed by farmers over the age of 55, and nearly a third by farmers over 65. In contrast, only 6% of the total land area is managed by farmers under 35.

A generational transfer is therefore required to enable new farmers to enter the profession, thus ensuring the future of Europe’s farming sector.

This is recognised by the European Parliament, which stated in their 2018 report on the CAP reform that “in order

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to achieve sustainable agriculture, young farmers must be able to invest and acquire agricultural land.”

However, instead of being a catalyst for new entrants into farming, the structure of the direct payment subsidies combined with inadequate support measures often concur to hamper the entry of prospective farmers.

This means that currently, only 1 out of every 3 new farmers receive public subsidies.

**PRECARIOUS FREE CONTRACTS**

Increasingly, prospective farmers are being driven to seek out more unconventional forms of land access.

Many new farmers are now choosing to enter into a mutually beneficial agreement with a landowner or established farmer who has land available and wants it to be used to develop a new farming business.

This agreement may take much different business and legal forms. In some instances, the new farmer and the landowner or established farmer will be business partners; in other instances, the relationship will be closer to a classical land tenancy.

A commonly used agreement is a free access arrangement called the ‘Commodat’, also known as a ‘loan for use’. This contract is described as “a precarious free contract” by the 2016-7 report by the EU Commission on supporting entry into farming.

The report states that this kind of contract theoretically allows for a partnership to be set up without entering into a conventional lease contract.

A reluctance to rent in the traditional sense means that most landowners prefer this kind of lease.

However, these can place farmers in a precarious condition, without necessarily the security to farm the land from one year to the next or any guarantee regarding the rental price.

**COMMISSION COMMITTED TO HELPING YOUNG FARMERS**

The EU executive acknowledged that land access is a major barrier to young farmers joining the profession, a Commission source told EURACTIV, adding that attracting young people into the sector and helping them establish themselves as viable businesses is one of the main priorities of the CAP post-2020.

They stated that, provided young farmers met the basic eligibility requirements, they were entitled to receive CAP subsidies while they were accessing land via a contract such as the ‘Commodat’. They specified that the subsidies would go to the land user, not the landowner.

Fiona Lally, communications officer at the Conseil Européen des Jeunes Agriculteurs (CEJA) representing young farmers, told EURACTIV that there have been a number of initiatives at member state level that facilitate the transfer of land between the older and younger generations of farmers.

These include the creation of partnerships, as it happens in Ireland with the Land Mobility Service and in Italy with “società di affiancamento” (mentoring partnerships).

She stated that if a written contract or agreement is put in place between the participants in such initiatives, a farmer’s access to EU subsidies will not be jeopardised.

However, it seems that this is not always how it works in practice.

EURACTIV spoke to David Dupuis from Terre-en-Vue, a movement that works to facilitate access to land in Belgium, who said that due to the relatively low average basic payment entitlement compared to the administrative burden of applying for subsidies, many young market gardeners are choosing to forgo subsidies.

He said the average basic payment to young farmers in Wallonia in 2019 was €114.15 per hectare per year. When combined with young and green payments, this made an average payment of €400 per hectare per year.

This is largely due to the fact that subsidies and extension services are still mostly tailored to continuers and ‘typical’ farming projects, but many young farmers practice innovative projects which often include uncommon activities on a small surface area.

Dupuis said this means that, in many cases, new market gardeners work on the land of other farmers or declarants who keep their basic payments.

He added that this is especially the case for older farmers, as they are often the ones who offer land to start-up market gardeners, who therefore capitalise on premiums to ensure their retirement.

Dupuis also said landowners often charge rent which is “often well above the legal land levels set by law on farms”.

Zoé Gallez, who also works for Terre-en-Vue, concurred, saying that while technically farmers are able to access CAP funding regardless of whether they lease or own the land, in practice, if a farmer rents a plot of land on a precarious or temporary basis to a young person, they will often tend to keep access to the aid.

She stated that this is because “administrative constraints often outweigh the financial advantage”.


France’s young farmers are struggling to establish themselves

By Cécile Barbière | EURACTIV.fr / Translated by Daniel Eck

Between the challenge of accessing land and the cost of transferring ownership of farms, young French farmers are struggling to establish themselves as farmers. The question is, will the next generation of farmers be able to take up the baton in France? EURACTIV France reports.

Nowadays, only one in five farmers in France are under 40 years old. Although there has been between 13,000 to 15,000 new-comers to the profession over the past ten years, they are far too few to compensate for the retirement of nearly one in two farmers by 2026.

“If this trend continues, nearly two-thirds of farmers will not be replaced,” warned Loïc Quellec, vice-president of the Young Farmers association in charge of generational renewal.

As a result, the number of active farmers is rapidly decreasing at a rate of 1.5% to 2% per year.

In 2018, there were 448,500 active farmers compared to 514,000 ten years ago. Continued on Page 17
earlier, according to the figures of the Mutualité Sociale Agricole (MSA), France’s social protection regime for those employed in the agricultural sector.

AGRICULTURAL LAND AT RISK?

The younger generations’ lack of enthusiasm for agriculture is due to a combination of factors. One of the main problems is that the current discourse about the agricultural world does not encourage young people to seek careers in the sector. This means that it is becoming increasingly uncommon for young farmers to take over the family farm.

"It is no longer automatic for one of the children to take over the business," confirmed Loïc Quellec. "Fortunately, there is a growing number of farms being run by non-farming families, as the children of farmers alone cannot ensure the renewal of generations," he added.

The hardships that come with the job, including low incomes, discourage young people from pursuing a career in farming.

According to a study by the MSA, the average income of farmers is around €1,250 per month. But one-third of the farmers earn less than 350 euros per month.

"For young people to move into this profession, we must first work to change this idea that farming is an unprofitable profession. While it is true that there are complicated cases, there are also farmers who earn their living," recalled Loïc Quellec.

To facilitate the transfer of farms outside the family, France’s Chambers of Agriculture have, for example, created “transferor-takeover” ("cédant-repreneur") meeting days. It is in this context that Jacky Tillier, a farmer of 80 Charolais cows who did not have a willing family member to leave the farm to, was able to find a young farmer to take over his farm.

“My fear was that the land I was working would end up being split up for various expansions and that no one would be interested in the buildings. My family had been living there since 1928 and it would have been emotionally painful for me to see it disappear,” he explained.

THE CHALLENGES OF TRANSFERRING FARMS

While it is difficult to find new land, transferring farms within the family can also prove challenging.

“When you are a farmer’s child, you might think that setting up a farm would be easier because there is access to land. But in practice, this is not always the case,” explained the representative of the Young Farmers’ association.

Farmers often rent their land, and thus cannot ensure the transfer of agricultural leases to their children.

Furthermore, land speculation sometimes hinders the availability of agricultural land.

“When I settled down, it took me six years to find a plot to build my stable and store hay because I am located in a very touristic region, the Alpes de Haute Provence. As a result, owners are reluctant to allow agricultural construction on a plot of land because they hope it will become constructible,” said the young farmer.

To support young buyers, several support structures exist, such as support for the installation and transfer for young farmers, or the exemption from inheritance tax when agricultural holdings are donated free of charge.

MISSION FOR THE CAP?

To ensure that young farmers are supported and that the future of France’s agriculture is safeguarded, the future Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) will have “an enormous role to play”, explained Loïc Quellec.

Today, the proposal for a future CAP foresees that 2% of the national budget be allocated to the installation of young farmers.

But at the same time, the age threshold for receiving the Natural Disabilities Compensatory Allowance (ICHN), which was intended for people under the age of 65, was abolished by Brussels as it was considered discriminatory.

This aid, which aims to support farmers in areas where production conditions are more difficult than elsewhere, therefore continues to be paid to farmers of retirement age, to the detriment of the youngest ones.

“Some farmers do not retire because direct payments are more advantageous than retirement,” Loïc Quellec concluded.