The EU farming sector is faced with an ageing population. In 2016 only 11% of farm managers in the EU were young farmers under the age of 40 years, according to Eurostat.

According to European Parliament surveys, even though EU assistance has been available to young farmers for more than three decades, the ‘young farmer problem’ seems to remain.

The European Commission’s proposal for the post-2020 Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has set nine objectives, one of which is generational renewal. The CAP budget will play a key role in achieving these goals but its future level is uncertain because member states are still discussing EU budget priorities for the period 2021-2027.

Another issue is the role of women in EU agriculture. Eurostat data from 2013 shows that on average around 30% of farms across the EU are managed by a woman. The differences among member states are remarkable, ranging from just over 5% in the Netherlands to around 47% in Lithuania.

In February 2017, the European Parliament’s Agriculture Committee and Women’s Committee approved a report calling for an enhanced role of women in EU farming.

EU lawmakers believe that women have a key role in helping to revive rural areas as well as avoiding further urbanisation.

“This report highlights the multifunctional role of a rural woman – as a mother, a homemaker, a worker, an educator, a manager of a family farm, a guardian of culture, heritage and tradition,” Croatian MEP Marjiana Petir told EURACTIV.com.

Similarly, a global study carried out by Corteva Agriscience found that discrimination against women in the farming sector is still widespread.

“Empowering women could help revive rural areas and meet rising food demand,” the report said.
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EU member states will have to deal with the generational renewal of the EU farming sector “whether they like it or not,” young farmers say. And to do so, they first need to support a strong budget for the post-2020 Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), they argue.

“As generational renewal is one of the CAP’s nine objectives, member states will be obliged to tackle this issue whether they like it or not,” Jannes Maes, president of the EU young farmers’ association (CEJA), told EURACTIV.com.

The EU farming sector is faced with an ageing population. If this trend continues, it will put the long-term sustainability of the sector at risk, critics warn.

In 2016 only 11% of farm managers in the EU were young farmers under the age of 40 years, according to official data from Eurostat, the EU statistical agency.

Austria has the highest proportion of young farmers (22.2%) followed by Poland (20.3%) and Slovakia (19.0%). On the other hand, Cyprus (3.3% of all farm managers), Portugal (4.2%) and the UK (5.3%) have the lowest share of young farmers.

The European Commission’s proposals for the post-2020 has nine objectives, one of which is to encourage young people to join the sector.

In particular, the EU executive proposed that a minimum of 2% of...
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direct payments allocated to each EU country (Pillar 1) should be set aside for young farmers, complemented by financial support under rural development objectives and measures facilitating access to land and land transfers.

Maes welcomed the Commission’s intention to prioritise young people in its proposals. However, he insisted that the proposed measures did not reflect this objective strongly enough.

“2% of ring-fencing in Pillar 1 simply won’t be sufficient to ensure generational renewal in agriculture takes place,” he said. “As CEJA, we’re pushing for the ring-fencing of 4% of funds in Pillar 1, as well as other measures,” he added.

‘BOLD’ DECISIONS

A big question is the future CAP budget. The European Commission proposed a significant cut in farm spending, saying the EU needed to use scarce financial resources to tackle new challenges such as security. The EU executive said it was up to the member states to fulfill this financial gap by increasing their national contributions to the CAP.

But many member states are reluctant to do so. France together with Greece, Spain, Ireland, Portugal and Finland, signed a joint declaration expressing their disappointment over the reduced CAP budget.

These countries argue that the CAP budget should be maintained (in real terms) at least at the same level as the current one also beyond 2020.

Cyprus and Bulgaria also joined this group of countries at a later stage.

“We want to raise the alarm about the sustainability of European agriculture. We believe that if we do not achieve a proper balance between resources and obligations, then the future of the EU agriculture and countryside will be uncertain,” Greek agriculture minister Stavros Arachovitis recently told EURACTIV.com in an interview.

Europe’s young farmers share a similar view. They believe that the continuation of the EU’s agricultural sector can only be ensured by creating specific measures for young farmers.

“But this relies on member states being willing to contribute sufficiently to the common budget,” Maes said.

If the EU wants to fulfill all of the CAP’s other objectives, then generational renewal in the sector will appear as a given, Maes argued.

“As this is not currently the case, it will be important that member states are held to account, which is why having relevant and precise indicators, to measure how many young people enter and remain in the sector is crucial.”

The battle over the EU’s next long-term budget for 2021-2027 – the so-called Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) – will provide evidence when it comes to making “bold decisions,” he said.

“A good MFF budget for 2021-2027 is key to ensuring the strength of the future CAP. Via a strong CAP, we can then support active farmers in dealing with the different challenges they face, whether they’re social, environmental or economic,” he said.
Women try to find their feet in French agriculture

By Cécile Barbière | EURACTIV.fr

Women are the great forgotten group of agricultural policies but represent a quarter of French farmers. In Brittany, the “agriculture au féminin” network is attempting to push forward the issue of gender equality in the farming sector.

The number of women in the profession is increasing as women set up 41% of agricultural enterprises. There are also more women taking the plunge into organic farming and forms of production like short supply chains.

But according to Nabila Gain-Nachi, a representative for equality and parity at the Brittany chamber of agriculture, sector does not care about equality.

“They’re concerned about the price of milk, their wages, the economy, etc.,” she said.

Gain-Nachi said there were many areas where gender equality can be improved in the agricultural sector, including physical work, land ownership, equal pay and even representation in decision-making bodies.

The département of Côtes-d’Armor in Brittany is at the forefront of the gender issue, considering that it’s the only chamber of agriculture which has established a group on gender equality in the agriculture sector.

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“The concept of ‘agriculture au féminin’ was created in 2004 in the Côtes-d’Armor chamber of agriculture. We did so when we realised that there was no such an initiative within the chambers of agriculture or generally,” Gain-Nachi said.

Using EU funds, the Côtes-d’Armor chamber of agriculture launched a study on female farm managers. The findings indicated that women feel professionally isolated.

“Female farmers are more affected by isolation than men. This observation has highlighted the need for specific measures to be taken to support women farmers,” Gain-Nachi added.

In September 2005, the chamber launched a day in the department for women farmers called “Agriculture au féminin”. Other departments in the Brittany region then followed and the regional group “Agricultrice au féminin” was set up in Brittany in 2009.

The group receives funding from the European Social Fund (ESF) to take measures to promote the attractiveness of agriculture, training and the recruitment of women to positions of responsibility.

“We have also produced the first communication guide to not include gender stereotypes for chambers of agriculture,” Gain-Nachi continued.

However, since the European programme ended in 2013, subsidies have been scarce and other French regions have hardly followed suit.

“Currently, we have a budget of around €30,000 a year for the Brittany region. We won’t be able to revolutionise the agricultural mindset with this alone,” Gain-Nachi said.

**DECISION-MAKING BODIES**

Women’s involvement in decision-making bodies is considered one of the main means to push the female farmers’ issue on the political agenda.

“We need more women in agricultural decision-making bodies,” Gain-Nachi added.

In 2013, a decree signed by former French Minister of Agriculture and Food Stéphane Le Foll imposed gender balance in the lists of candidates for elections in the chambers of agriculture.

However, positions of responsibility often remain largely closed to women, as they currently chair only four chambers of agriculture.

**“COLLABORATING SPOUSE” STATUS**

Another fundamental step forward in supporting female farmers was the establishment of the status of “collaborating spouse” in France in 1999.

“This reform brought some recognition to women who worked in the background for so long,” Gain-Nachi said. “Before this, farmers’ partners were nothing on a farm. Now, they have a status,” she added.

In 2014, nine out of ten “collaborating spouses” were women, according to data from Mutualité Sociale Agricole (MSA), which provides social security cover in the agricultural sector.

Despite the “collaborating spouse” status, a number of women still work without any legal status (between 2,000 and 5,000 according to a report by the French Senate).

However, these small steps have not been carried forward at European level. The gender issue is rarely found in the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), which is currently being negotiated in Brussels.

“In the new CAP, there’s nothing for women, nothing at all. We did suggest arrangements, such as differentiated support for setting up for women, who face particular difficulties compared to men,” Gain-Nachi said.

“There are things that the CAP could give impetus to with respect to the place of women in agriculture, which could also benefit men too, such as the development of ergonomic tools for the most physical work,” she added.

In the European Parliament, the issue of women’s place in the future CAP also raises questions.

The Parliament’s committees on Agriculture and Rural Development (AGRI) and Women’s Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM) have called for gender equality to be integrated into the future CAP.

As it stands, this suggestion is not included in the European Commission’s proposal for the new CAP.
The lack of proper infrastructure in German rural areas, as well as poor support for new small farms, prevent young people from investing in agriculture and force them to move to cities.

“In some regions, for example in my home [state of] Schleswig Holstein, the offer of employment is very limited,” said Kathrin Muus, the chair of the German young farmers’ association (BDL).

“People often have no choice but to leave. And it’s difficult to set up new businesses if infrastructure, such as broadband, day-care centres or schools, is lacking,” she added.

Small agricultural businesses in Germany face difficult times putting the sustainability of the sector to the test. Critics suggest that structural changes in rural areas are a major problem often overlooked in the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reform.

The so-called Höfesterben (dying out of farms) is frequently mentioned in German media as a rising phenomenon and has raised the eyebrows of policymakers.

The “agricultural atlas” published by the Heinrich Böll Foundation earlier this year in January was a wake-up call. It called for a complete re-thinking of the European agricultural system, which according to the

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foundation, it currently provides more benefits to large farms.

Höfesterben is not entirely to blame for the dramatic abandonment of rural areas. However, agriculture is an important factor, which supports economic, social and cultural life in rural areas.

“When job losses are discussed, most people think about the industry or the service sector. The primary sector is often overlooked. You often get the impression that job losses in agriculture are less significant and valuable,” Hubert Weiger, the chair of the German Nature And Biodiversity Conservation Union (NABU), told EURACTIV Germany.

**SMALL FARMERS FEEL UNSUPPORTED**

There are many reasons why smaller farmers decide to shut their businesses. It is often due to a change of generation, as fewer and fewer young people are able or want to take on family-run farms.

BDL chair Muus said many young people did not opt to work in the agricultural sector because the profession brings uncertainty.

“The parameters are constantly changing, the working hours are long, there is no fixed income,” Muus explained.

Setting up a new farm is expensive and there is often a lack of initial financial assistance. Moreover, land prices are on the rise in the EU – for example, in Bulgaria, land prices increased by 175% between 2006 and 2012. In addition to this, price competition is so relentless that the business is not worthwhile for many farmers.

The dramatic nature of the problem is reflected in a response from the German Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture to a question raised by the Greens in September 2018. The ministry stated that, since 1999, around 42% of all agricultural businesses had been closed and the number of workers in the agricultural sector had been reduced by a third.

This is because it is mainly farms which are large in terms of the area that receive funding from the CAP. In 2013, more than half of the agricultural land in the EU was used by only 3.1% of all of the farms.

**LITTLE MONEY GOES INTO REGIONAL SUPPORT**

In order to avert this trend, analysts say the second pillar of the CAP should support rural areas and boost farmers’ competitiveness, rather than only serve environmental protection. Every year, more than €14 billion is provided for this purpose in the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD).

In theory, farmers can obtain funding for training, company renovations or investment support through the fund, which is co-funded by municipalities.

However, the member states have the freedom to establish their own funding priorities. During the last CAP reform in 2013, additional funding was made available to support small farms in particular. But many governments do not pay out this funding, the Heinrich Böll Foundation stated.

Germany could, therefore, send up to 30% of the national direct payments to smaller farms. However, according to the ‘agricultural atlas’, only 7% is allocated to this end. In total, of the €1.35 billion euros that Germany receives from the EAFRD, around 16% of the fund is used for rural development, according to the Federal ministry of food and agriculture.

While support for young farmers and sustainable operating models should be strengthened, the European Commission has at the same time proposed cuts in the second pillar. Consequently, up to 27% of its budget could disappear.

Weiger said there was already a structural problem in support from the second pillar. Many regions are already failing with respect to the co-funding required.

“Some German states are finding it difficult, local authorities in Saxony or Brandenburg are having problems raising the necessary funds,” Weiger said.

In order to revitalise rural areas, he said, solidarity from society and more coordinated funding programmes should be put in place, especially for small agricultural businesses. “Currently, the EU, the ministries and the German states provide support in parallel to each other.”
Getting a loan is the biggest problem faced by young farmers in Romania, especially when they are unable to provide guarantees as back-up.

Mihai Petre was just 20 when he started his EU-funded project, although he was no beginner in the farming sector.

An agronomy student in Bucharest, Petre had already worked in his family’s agricultural business when he decided to start a mushroom farm.

But he soon found out that the most difficult part was not to get a €200,000 grant from the EU. The harder part, he said, was hard to find a bank to finance his first steps, as his young age was seen more as a liability than an advantage.

“I had very good relations with consultants and the Romanian authorities,” Petre told EURACTIV Romania. “Lacking enough funds, I tried to take a bank loan. But I found out that no banker was willing to finance me because of my age and lack of credit history,” he said.

The young farmer ultimately found a bank willing to finance him, after his father brought some guarantees and mortgaged the land as back-up for his son’s mushroom farm.

But the EU-funded project was held back as a result. “It was supposed to be operational in six months or one year at most, but the implementation period was delayed,” Petre said.

Two years later, the project is now in the final stages: production should start in spring and Petre is already seeking funding for a vegetable and mushroom processing facility.

But the money won’t come from
the National Rural Development Programme (NRDP), which financed the mushroom farm. More likely, it will come from the Start-up Nation programme launched by the Romanian government to support companies in their first steps.

Petre already has set sights on the next Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), considering that the funds in the current rural development programme have mostly dried out.

“The first project is the hardest; the next ones will be easier. I'll wait for the post-2020 funds,” Petre explained.

The European Commission's proposal for the post-2020 CAP has set nine objectives, one of which is generational renewal. The CAP budget will play a key role in achieving these goals but its future level is uncertain because member states are still discussing EU budget priorities for 2021-2027.

Romania should get more than €20 billion in the 2021-2027 period, but local authorities are unhappy with the Commission's proposal.

Farmers in Romania won’t see their direct payments reduced, but there will be less money for rural development, which includes support for young farmers.

The generational renewal of Romania’s agriculture is crucial, considering that more than 40% of farmers there are at least 50 years old.

Romanian agriculture minister Petre Daea told EURACTIV in an interview last spring that “there is a major interest in replacing the generations in the farming sector, and all of us employed in the field get a major satisfaction when youngsters start working in agriculture.”

But the money isn't the main problem for young farmers, according to Elvira Bakker, deputy head of unit at the European Commission's agriculture directorate (DG AGRI).

Speaking at an event organised by EURACTIV in Bucharest in late 2018, the Commission official said there were lots of problems due to lack of guarantees, land access or the fiscal system in various countries.

“Therefore, we asked every country to include in their national plans a strategy for young farmers and the generational change in agriculture,” Bakker said.

RED TAPE INSISTS

But getting access to financing is not the only problem Romanian young farmers are faced with.

“There's a lot of red tape... For us, who live in small villages, it is difficult to go to fiscal authorities, start a business, and register. A lot of young people living in rural areas give up,” says Culina Apetroae, a young farmer who got a €30,000 EU grant to set up her farm in Galati County in eastern Romania.
Excessive red tape, combined with lack of access to land and proper rural infrastructure, continues to be the main obstacle to attracting young men and women in Spain’s agriculture sector.

In Spanish institutions and the agri-food sector, it’s common knowledge that generational renewal in farming needs to be reinforced. However, access to land and financing, as well as excessive bureaucracy, pose severe challenges, particularly to young farmers.

In an effort to shed light on the situation Spanish young farmers are faced with, EFE agro interviewed a number of stakeholders from the Spanish agriculture sector as well as young farmers who recently started their business.

They said access to land remains a key obstacle.

“There must be measures in the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) to facilitate access to land and other [measures] to encourage young people to take up farming,” they said.

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Ignacio López Asenjo, director of international relations for the agricultural organisation Asaja.

“Conditions to access land and payment rights could be improved, so that older farmers are not affected, but at the same time young people can also join the sector,” Asenjo added.

The Spanish government has already allocated some €880 million from the current CAP to co-finance the first installation aid. The objective is to provide assistance to 21,300 producers, some 8,000 of whom have already received it.

An example is Pedro Gomariz, a 31-year-old citrus producer from Murcia (southeast Spain). After studying business administration, he decided to return to his village and take over the family farm when his father retired.

Gomariz is the fifth generation from his family to work on these lands.

In addition to excessive red tape and the days “lost” in bureaucratic procedures, he told Efe Agro how heavy taxation prevented his father from donating him the land, and he therefore had to rent it.

Six months after the administrative steps were initiated, he finally got some licenses, “something that doesn’t happen every day”, he said.

He also received incentives, which he used to buy a tractor and modernise his farm.

Now, he produces 1,000 tonnes of lemons and grapefruit, uses solar energy and has a cover over the water basins.

Gonzalo Vilsus, a 29-year old farmer, is another example. He grows cereals and vegetables in Murillo del Fruto (Navarra).

“Since I was a little kid, I liked the countryside a lot,” he said. “My father is dedicated to this and has helped me a lot”.

Vilsus explained how difficult it was to start his own agri-business considering that there is “no one to support you and the land is the main barrier.”

He also received CAP funds, which helped him join the sector. He is very pleased with his current work and says he is not willing to change profession.

“I am now the one in charge and I make my own decisions regarding my farm,” Vilsus said.

THE CAP CANNOT CONTINUE WITHOUT WOMEN

Spain’s Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, Luis Planas, has said the equation to achieving a sustainable agricultural sector has three key elements: access to water, digitalisation of the production system and the incorporation of young people and women in the countryside.

On the latter, Planas pushed through the European Parliament the need to include a gender perspective in the CAP.

But the proposal submitted by the European Commission at the end of 2018 on “the future of food and agriculture” does not make a single reference to rural women, said Carmen Quintanilla the president of the Association of Families and Women of the Rural World (Afammer).

“The future CAP has to incorporate measures to reduce the gender wage gap in the rural environment and to encourage the generational changeover of women,” Quintanilla said.

For Spanish farmer María de los Ángeles Rosado, in order to keep activity in the countryside, it is also essential that public authorities provide them with services and technological infrastructures.

“There should be paediatricians, broadband, roads … everything that allows us not only to work in the agri-food sector but also to live and establish ourselves as individuals, as families,” she said.
Low returns and rural areas’ restrictions keep young Greek farmers away

By Sofia Elanidou | EURACTIV.gr

Low profitability and poor infrastructure quality make farming in Greece unattractive to young people, who are needed more than ever before to take the agricultural sector a step forward, stakeholders have told EURACTIV Greece.

“The farming profession is less attractive to the younger generation, be it men or women, because of the low returns compared to other occupations and the restrictions of living in the more remote rural areas,” Elli Tsiforou, an agricultural expert, told EURACTIV.gr.

Tsiforou, who leads GAIA EPICHEIREIN’s Brussels office, a Greek member of the EU farmer and cooperative organisation Copa-Cogeca, said immediate measures should be taken to attract the younger generation.

Critics warn that an increasingly ageing population and the lack of women farmers will continue to put obstacles in the development of the country’s farming sector.

“We should revamp the profession itself to make it more attractive for the younger generation.” [GAIA EPICHEIREIN]

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them,” Tsiforou added.

“If we don’t propose a common, adequately funded and visionary agricultural policy based on knowledge and innovation, securing farmers’ incomes and creating added value both for them and for rural areas and the broader society, I’m afraid that measures like the first installation and investment support will not suffice to reverse the statistics in the long run”, she said.

NEW CAP CUTS CAUSE A HEADACHE

According to Areti Vaiopoulou, a Greek livestock producer from West Thessalia, the more new farmers remain in the market, the better it is for the agricultural sector in Greece.

“The average age of the farming community is reduced and new ideas, new minds, new scientists are entering the market,” she told EURACTIV.gr.

Greek farmers say Europe’s current agricultural policy has already brought innovation in the field but a lot more remains to be done.

Vaiopoulou said the current CAP indeed assisted new farmers extensively, but professionals are worried about the proposed cuts in the post-2020 CAP, especially about the implications it may have on young farmers in their first steps.

The main areas where farmers still expect support from the new CAP involves the rise of the production costs, the market prices and the quality of production.

“We don’t want to lose the current CAP’s push. Personally, as a livestock producer, I need help with the networking of my products,” she added.

FEMALE FARM MANAGERS

At the same time, the number of female farmers remains relatively limited in Greece and they struggle to maintain their own businesses.

“In other countries, the banking system encourages women to support their businesses but here, you need to do everything on your own”, Vaiopoulou said, highlighting the role of cooperatives in coordinating the exchange of experiences and actions in the market.

For Elli Tsiforou, women farmers are agricultural entrepreneurs taking full part in the modernisation of the EU agri-food sector.

“And what they expect from the future CAP, exactly as their male peers, are visionary, modern policy tools allowing them to be sustainable in all dimensions of the term”, she said.
Small farms dominate the Polish agriculture. Their area gradually decreases, but data from the Central Statistical Office shows that the average Polish farmer has two to five hectares of land at his/her disposal. Usually, the landowner is a man over the age of 45, as the number of young farmers is in a sharp decline. And although most of them are men, women are also represented. According to 2016 data, there were more than 30,000 women farmers aged between 25 and 34 in Poland.

EURACTIV.pl talked to one of them, Monika Stycz-Kuryluk, who runs her ecological farm together with her spouse in the village of Holeszów in the Lublin province.

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You did not grow up in the countryside and you decided to start an agricultural activity only as an adult. Your husband was raised on a farm and you decided to run the farm with him. How do you assess this decision?

My decision to move to the countryside and run an organic farm was taken more emotionally than reasonably. Nevertheless, my intuition did not disappoint me. Today, after six years of working in the countryside and living off the land, I have no doubt that it was the right decision. My professional life is fulfilled, full of challenges and satisfaction. The hard work on the farm is for me a strong guideline for how I want to live my life and how I can give what is best for our customers – high-quality food with a unique taste.

What are the most important non-agricultural challenges in the countryside nowadays?

One has to find answers to three questions: how to stop the process of depopulating the countryside, how to preserve the agricultural landscape and the loss of biodiversity in agriculture.

How significant would it be to step up efforts to create new non-agricultural occupational and infrastructural opportunities in rural areas?

I believe that such actions should be balanced in an appropriate manner so that they do not pull farmers away from farming. The non-agricultural activity in rural areas should not disturb the character of the village.

How do you see the impact of the current EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) on the situation of farmers in Poland?

The CAP has its advantages and disadvantages. The advantages include: the opening of borders for the movement of goods and services within the EU, raising the standard of living of farmers, providing subsidies to farmers, creating a compensation system for natural disasters, introducing the obligation to label food, which has some impact on food quality, improving the quality of plant production in organic farming and, finally, raising the standard of living for farmers.

But there are disadvantages, as well. And these are: an oversized bureaucracy, no area restrictions for relevant subsidies, lack of practical facilities for the so-called farm processing (i.e. at farm level), sanitary rules unfavourable for processing at farm level, lack of practical protection of the common market against the inflow of cheap goods from third countries (mostly from Ukraine or China), artificial regulation of production, subsidies-per-hectare system of subsidies (which insufficiently supports organic farms), progressive concentration of land, differentiation of subsidy rates in different countries, a clear decline in biodiversity level in agriculture, subsidizing industrial animal husbandry or a scant support for organic farming.

What would you expect from the new CAP?

Above all, I expect subsidies to be awarded depending on the environmental impact, and determination of maximum surface when subsidising farms.

In addition, more effective protection of European farmers against the inflow of cheap goods from outside of the EU is needed, as well as the introduction of public procurement for local organic food, bonuses for farms with sustainable crop and animal production and so-called farm processing.

Last but not least, support for direct product sales, bonuses for farms actively participating in the education system of organic farming and promoting organic food in schools would all be crucial.

Should young farmers have a special treatment in the new CAP?

I believe that young farmers should have greater preferences in the purchase or lease of land. An efficient consultancy system (legal, accounting, marketing, etc.) based on trained practitioners should also be implemented.
How the CAP ‘saved’ two women farmers from southern Italy

By Mario Liberto | Sicilia Agricoltura

EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) funds have helped a family in southern Italy revive and even innovate their business. EURACTIV’s partner Sicilia Agricoltura reports.

Anna Savasta and sister-in-law Marinella Romano are two smallholders in Roccapalumba, a small town near Palermo. It is affectionately known by locals as the town of stars and prickly pears.

They received funding to implement an EU project that helped them renovate existing buildings in a large area to increase prickly pear cultivation.

“Thanks to the EU aid, we were able to save our family business,” they said, adding that the financial support included the purchase of technical equipment like a calibration machine, a brush roller for fruit and a wrapping machine.

They also built a cold storage unit that lets them preserve more fruit, in order to extend the marketing period, but also a petting zoo and multimedia facilities.

NEW CAP AND WOMEN

They said knowledge, innovation and technology are the cornerstones

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to guarantee the success of the post-2020 CAP.

According to the Italian farmers, the goal of the next CAP should be to upgrade a rather obsolete agricultural sector that needs radical change, ranging from technology to generational renewal.

Only 5.6% of all European farms are managed by farmers under 35, while more than 31% are over 65, for a total of 3.2 million farmers now in retirement age.

To ensure that these goals are achieved, agriculture needs adequate support, but the new CAP will be smaller – it is set to get 38% of the EU budget, a decrease on previous years.

Smart and resilient agriculture needs to start again with the participation of women.

Women have always been crucial in the food industry as they have traditionally been part of the last stage, transforming a primary product into a commodity after the traditional production processes.

Today, one out of three farms in Italy is run by a woman and more than 400,000 women are employed in the sector. Women’s efforts in the sector are regenerating companies with new activities linked to the quality of food, transforming ancient know-how into economics.

New female entrepreneurship is emerging also in agritourism sector, thanks to women’s innovative skills. Women manage, on average, almost 40% of the Italian agritourism companies.

Old farmsteads or farms have been made over into beautiful farmhouses, equipped with all modern comforts, and tourist demand for this is constantly increasing, despite the economic crisis.
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