

**Mr Christophe Hansen
Commissioner for Agriculture and Food
European Commission**

Brussels, 20 January 2025

Subject: Call for greater support for mountain farming in the Vision for Agriculture and Food.

Dear Commissioner for Agriculture and Food, Mr Christophe Hansen,

First of all, we would like to congratulate you on your recent appointment as Commissioner for Agriculture and Food. Aware of the major challenges posed by CAP reform, we are convinced that your mandate offers a unique opportunity to make significant and positive changes for our mountain communities. Euromontana, the European Association of mountain areas, looks forward to working constructively with you to build the future of European agriculture and food systems.

As this new term of office begins, Euromontana wishes to bring to your attention the pressing concerns of mountain farmers and the territories to which they are inextricably linked. Given the urgency of the situation, we call on you to pay particular attention to these concerns as part of your Vision for Agriculture and Food.

Mountain farming plays a vital role in European agricultural production: it accounts for **18% of farms** and 15% of the agricultural workforce in the European Union, as well as 34% of the Geographical Indications registered at the European level.

At the same time, mountain farming practices provide essential ecosystem services, such as preserving fragile habitats, storing carbon in permanent grasslands and maintaining unique, recognised and protected cultural practices such as transhumance.

At a territorial level, agriculture remains a major pillar of mountain economies, with great potential for innovation and product differentiation. It also contributes to maintaining populations and social structures in areas at risk of depopulation.

Despite these crucial contributions, mountain farming faces major challenges that threaten its future, in particular the **economic viability of farms and the attractiveness of the profession**. These issues require strong political commitment and appropriate responses to ensure the long-term future of our regions and their positive contribution to European society.

The report from the Strategic Dialogue on the Future of Agriculture and the conclusions of the AGRIFISH Council on 9 December emphasise the **need for greater support for areas facing natural or other specific constraints**, particularly mountain areas. We invite you, Commissioner, to take up these recommendations and translate them into concrete measures to support mountain farmers in the forthcoming **Vision for Agriculture and Food**.

Ensuring fair remuneration and fostering generational renewal

Mountain farming faces major structural challenges. The specific geographical constraints of our regions limit agricultural productivity, which is 40% lower than in other regions. Yet our agricultural model offers high-quality, sustainable products while contributing to the provision of essential

ecosystem services. Despite these contributions, **mountain farmers still earn 20.4% less than the average.**

This situation weighs heavily on the renewal of generations, a crucial issue for our regions. By 2040, the European Union could lose up to 6.4 million farms, with an increased risk of land abandonment in mountain areas. This decline would have major repercussions on food production, landscapes and the vitality of our regions.

Faced with this urgent situation, Euromontana is calling on the European Union to step up its support for mountain farming to ensure fair and stable incomes.

We call on the European Union to:

- Maintain substantial support via a robust envelope **dedicated to payments for Areas with Natural Constraints** and by encouraging the Member States to make full use of this measure in their Strategic Plans
- **Facilitate access to land and financing** to foster the installation of new farmers in mountain areas, particularly young farmers. Euromontana advocates increased aid for setting up in mountain areas.
- **Focus support on productive activities** by reserving support to active farmers.

Recognising the positive externalities of extensive livestock farming

Mountain farming suffers from a lack of recognition and promotion of its **extensive farming model**. Because of the steep slopes and harsh climatic conditions, livestock farming is the main agricultural activity in mountain areas. Meat and dairy products produced using this model account for 22% and 29% respectively of mountain farm production.

In addition to their economic dimension, agropastoral practices provide **essential ecosystem services**, particularly in terms of biodiversity, landscape preservation and climate resilience. On a European scale, the total value of these services is estimated at €71 billion a year. Yet these benefits remain largely underestimated and insufficiently valued. Nevertheless, current policies struggle to differentiate between intensive and extensive farming practices.

We call on the European Union to:

- **Formulate a clear and positive vision** for the continuity and support of extensive livestock farming in the European Union, with targeted support based mainly on grassland and grazing surfaces. The vision should also recognise the role of products from extensive practices in sustainable food systems and healthy diets.
- Propose a European **Action Plan for Pastoralism**, aimed at promoting pastoral activities and improving **working conditions** for those involved in the sector
- **Strengthen payments for ecosystem services**, such as eco-schemes, by providing Member States with clear guidance on the most effective measures to encourage and remunerate sustainable farming practices in mountain areas

Enhancing the value of mountain products in sustainable food systems

Mountain products reflect the exceptional natural and cultural heritage in which they are produced. Thanks to the quality of their natural resources, such as permanent grassland, and traditional

production and processing methods, these products have unique characteristics. Mountain farmers are behind 34% of the Geographical Indications registered at the European level.

As such, it is vital to recognise this **territorial anchorage** and to promote this culinary heritage as part of sustainable local food systems.

We call on the European Union to:

- **Facilitate the participation of small farmers in public procurement contracts** by making it easier to split contracts, and **introduce criteria for local and regional products** as part of the forthcoming reform of the Public Procurement Directive.
- **Reinforce the EU's promotion policy** to better support the participation of small value chains and enhance the value of small designations, particularly on the internal market.

For a vibrant agriculture in vibrant mountains

Finally, Euromontana's vision has always been that of living mountains, driven by their farmers but, more broadly, by all mountain communities. As an active member of the Rural Pact Coordination Group, Euromontana reaffirms the need to implement the objectives of the **Long Term Vision for Rural Areas**, which is essential to strengthening the attractiveness and vitality of our mountain areas and ensuring consistency between it and the Vision for Agriculture and Food, and to further promote **rural proofing** as both a guiding and measuring tool for investing in rural areas.

We invite you to consider these elements when working on the Vision for Agriculture and Food and, more broadly, on the EU's future agricultural policy.

Thank you for your attention to this crucial issue.

Yours sincerely,

Laura Gascón Herrero
President

