

26 July 2024

The wider societal role of livestock farming must not be overlooked in the outcomes of the Strategic Dialogue on the Future of EU Agriculture.

Dear President Von der Leyen,

In a first instance we would like to congratulate on your second term as President of the European Commission.

In your re-election speech and publication of the Political Guidelines for the next European Commission, we took note that farming was listed amongst the key EU priorities. Whilst we welcome a new strategic approach, the lack of mention of the livestock sector in particular shows a worrying trend towards a narrow vision for this valuable sector, i.e. solely for the production of meat, milk and eggs for human consumption.

This absence of recognition for the livestock sector was echoed in the selection of organisations contributing to the Strategic Dialogue on the Future of EU Agriculture. Several animal farming related organisations had formally asked you in writing to be allowed to participate in the meetings around the Strategic Dialogue, but the request was rejected. This exclusion is indeed regrettable as their expertise, inputs and contributions would have been essential to ensure a balanced and factual debate, offering greater understanding of how technological progress and innovation contributes to improving the sustainability of the EU animal agriculture to preserve European culture and heritage.

Although we raised our apprehension around this exclusion when the dialogue launched, and we were placated with an opportunity to participate in the online consultation, we are now deeply concerned to hear echoes during this final stage of the discussion that, once again, a blinkered and one-sided approach has been taken as regards the livestock sector. Such an approach is simply not representative of a truly balanced dialogue. And your announcement for a Circular Economy Act would be frankly non-comprehensive by overlooking the well-established role of the livestock sector converting human-inedible biomass into high-value animal proteins, improving sustainability and nutrient efficiency of EU agriculture

Livestock offers more than just meat, milk, eggs and fish for human consumption. Aside from the nutritional and health benefits¹ associated with the regular consumption of animal-sourced foods, scientists also recognise that well-managed animals are an integral part of the bioeconomy and agricultural systems², as they convert massive quantities of residual, human-inedible biomass from growing plants into food for human consumption. Such biomass would otherwise have to be handled as waste, whereas livestock can recycle plant nutrients back to the land, while sequestering carbon, improving soil health, restoring degraded landscapes, and offering many other ecosystem services. The use of by-products for other important sectors in the bioeconomy, such as wool and leather, biofuels, organic fertiliser, pet food, pharmaceuticals, and much more, must not be the victim of this one-sided reductionist approach. Nor must we forget the increasing global need for animal protein.

¹ **The role of meat in the human diet: evolutionary aspects and nutritional value:**

<https://academic.oup.com/af/article/13/2/11/7123475>

² **Ecosystem management using livestock: embracing diversity and respecting ecological principles:**

<https://academic.oup.com/af/article/13/2/28/7123478>

With our highly efficient food production system in Europe, it would be irresponsible of Europe to stop contributing to the global food supply.

Together, many associations either contributing to, or dependent on, the livestock sector call on you to pay critical attention to our concerns and ensure a truly balanced outcome from the Strategic Dialogue. We would very much appreciate it if we could organise a meeting, prior to the conclusion of the dialogue, to discuss both our concerns and contributions in more detail.

Signatories:

