

TARRAGONA MANIFESTO

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Aspirational objectives of agricultural cooperatives to address the generational challenge in the agricultural and forestry sectors.

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PREAMBLE

The European agriculture and forestry sectors face a worsening demographic emergency. This existential crisis is fully recognised by Cogeca and its members.

Young farmers, agricultural cooperative leaders, and high-level policymakers gathered on 9 November 2023 in Tarragona, Spain, to strategically exchange ideas on the role of agricultural cooperatives in addressing the challenge of generational renewal facing European agriculture.

Farmers under the age of 40 only manage 11% of all farm holdings in the EU, of which young women farmers represent only 3 % of the total. Persuading more young people to enter into farming is the most significant challenge for European agriculture and forestry to remain competitive.

This Cogeca Presidency Business Forum underlined how agri-cooperatives are already actively involved in initiatives to end this crisis, across Member States and across our sectors.

The role of agri-cooperatives in helping young farmers overcome barriers to installation, providing guidance services and enhancing their participation in the policy dialogue have also been recently highlighted by the resolution on “Generational renewal in the EU farms of the future” of the European Parliament. The resolution also insisted on the need to ensure the representation of young farmers in cooperative enterprises and to ensure gender-balanced representation in their governance bodies, emphasising that cooperatives are key for involving young men and women in agricultural activity.

While considering the positive externalities already created by agri-cooperatives to address the challenge, it also is clear that much more needs to be done to stop a critical trend that may endanger the long-term sustainability of sector as well as food security.

Agri-food cooperatives are businesses owned by their farmers members who take the decisions democratically. Their joint efforts are driven by the need to improve farmers' position in the food supply chain, add value for their products, reduce costs and boost the sustainability of the sector. They are successful businesses that unite farmers of different generations around common economic, social, and environmental goals.

Cogeca and our members are committed to promoting policies, strategies and interventions that enable young people and new entrants in farming to develop their entrepreneurial and managerial skills, and create new economic opportunities for them, their enterprises, and rural communities, thereby meeting the challenge of generational renewal.

We, members of Cogeca, representing 22,000 cooperative enterprises across the EU solemnly declare our commitments to these aspirational objectives to foster generational renewal in European agriculture:



Economic, social and environmental sustainability: supporting young farmers and their involvement in cooperative enterprises

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Support the professional projects of young people and direct them toward the achievement of long term economic, social, and environmental objectives.

Give farmers and forest owners a competitive edge by improving market returns and reducing operating costs.

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Facilitate financial support to young agricultural entrepreneurs for their start-up or takeover projects.

Facilitate access to land for young people, one of the main barriers to entry into the sector.

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Facilitate joint investments, improve environmental sustainability while maintaining the competitiveness of cooperative enterprises.

Support the uptake of innovation and involve young farmers in digital-driven actions and projects.

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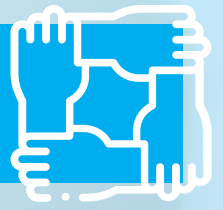
Secure incomes and support young farmers and forest with risk management tools.

Provide advisory services to young women and men in agriculture vis-a-vis agronomic, commercial and legislative perspectives.

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Promote social investments to improve family support services in rural areas for young women and men.



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Encourage involvement of young farmers and forest owners in the life of the cooperative and ensure that young farmers are given the opportunities to grow and take their place in our cooperative movement.

Continue to facilitate the engagement of young women and men and new entrants at all levels of the cooperative structure.

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Promote access to responsibilities within the governance structure.

Launch consultations of young cooperators and stakeholders in the food and forestry sectors to anticipate trends for the agricultural and industrial model and be equipped to cope with the social issues associated with them.

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Skills Development

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Develop training programmes for new entrants in cooperatives and consolidate technical skills and fill the skills gap in sustainability, digitalisation and the bio and circular economy.

Develop training programmes for new entrants in agriculture and forestry, with a focus on young farmers, promoting access to decision-making roles in cooperatives.

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Facilitate international internships and mentoring opportunities to promote internal cooperation as well as cooperation between large and small cooperatives and between young and experienced cooperators.

Provide young leaders with opportunities to understand the development of cooperatives operating in other countries, including through exchanges of best practices and study tours.

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Promotion of the Cooperative Model



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Promote cooperative entrepreneurship through adequate enabling environments with dedicated financial resources.

Improve knowledge of cooperatives amongst young people and new entrants in the sector.

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Promote the teaching of the cooperative model at all educational levels and promote research to stimulate and highlight cooperative entrepreneurship in the agri-food and forestry sectors.



Partnerships

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Build and strengthen constructive partnerships to achieve common objectives as well as democratic and inclusive cultures of cooperation.

Foster relations with specialised banks in order to facilitate access to finance for young farmers and forest owners.

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Continue to work within Cogeca as a strategic platform to exchange best practices and strategies to address the generational challenge for the sector and cooperative enterprises.

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