



Berlin, 18th January 2020

## Call to the 12<sup>th</sup> Berlin Agriculture Ministers' Conference

Dear Ministers,

We are peasant farmers from Germany, who have come to the International Green Week in Berlin today with our tractors, for the 10th consecutive year, to demonstrate with civil society for socially just, environmentally-friendly and climate-friendly farming. We are protesting against the loss of farms worldwide, and we call for *good food, good farming*. The organisers of this event come from the fields of agriculture, artisanal food production, development cooperation, climate and environment protection, conservation, animal welfare, and consumer protection.

We came once more, because “business as usual” in agricultural, ducking the big challenges, is something that farmers, society and politicians cannot afford. Farmers have taken to the streets with their tractors, and they have good reason to do so. There is currently a great need for change, and farms cannot deal with this issue on their own. For decades, the approach in agricultural policy and economics was “grow or give way”. This was supported by political decision makers, the agricultural industry, consultancy and science, and by some farmers’ associations. The focus was on specialised farms, increased performance and increased quantity per animal and per hectare, with the goal of international cost leadership leading to excessively low prices for producers and high global market shares. At a national and international level, this agricultural system means that ecological, social and economic boundaries are crossed. It ruins our farms in Germany, farms in Africa, farms in Brazil and in India, and it has driven far too many of our fellow farmers to give up. And that's not all: It means a massive loss of acceptance in society. However, the work of farmers, producing healthy food and maintaining nature and biodiversity, is hugely valuable. As farmers, we have come together with civil society to fight for these values that are so fundamental to our lives.

### **WTO and agricultural trade as drivers of “grow or give way”**

Farms around the world find themselves in a deep existential crisis. The most serious problem is that prices for the products of peasant farmers have not been adequate for decades. Since the founding of the World Trade Organization (WTO), its Agreement on Agriculture in 1995, and the subsequent opening of agricultural markets, the economic pressure on farms has increased dramatically. The one-dimensional cost pressure has led to a great loss of peasant’s values, their knowledge, and above all farms themselves. The trade doctrine of the WTO has caused predatory competition that should never have existed between production sites, production methods, food systems, and particularly between farmers. Our

demonstrations show that around the world, farmers and civil society want to use trade and exchange to complement each other, not to displace each other through dumping prices and the “grow or give way” approach.

### **We are demonstrating today in Berlin,**

- to show political leaders in Germany and around the world that the work of farmers in the fields and in the stalls is valuable and should be protected;
- to show how important it is to have a high number of farms and young people involved in farming, for vital rural areas;
- to show our commitment to aggressively tackle the current challenges, through arable and pasture farming that respects the environment, climate and insects, and includes environmentally friendly, species-appropriate animal husbandry;
- to protest against the EU-MERCOSUR trade agreement, which in its current form would further boost cultivation of GM soya and industrial livestock farming in South America – with disastrous consequences for the environment, the climate, and the health of local people – and would also threaten farmers’ livelihoods on both continents;
- to fight for GMO-free farming and food production. New genetic engineering processes, such as CRISPR, are also genetic engineering, and they must be regulated globally in the context of the United Nations;
- to finally achieve active and consistent implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas, which was passed a year ago.

### **Your international Agriculture Ministers’ Conference focuses on agricultural trade.**

**The title of your conference is: “Food for all! Trade for Secure, Diverse and Sustainable Nutrition.”**

However, without farmers producing food and animal feed, there is no food and no agricultural trade, and agricultural trade has always been part of peasants’ life. The problem is therefore not agricultural trade, but rather the way it has been structured and regulated to the detriment of farmers through the WTO. The misalignment of global agricultural trade can also be seen by the fact that it is rather a driver of climate change and loss of biodiversity than it does not offer solutions for the challenges. It has also promoted the disastrous imbalance in the global food system, rather than working against it. While 820 million people are going hungry and 2 billion people are malnourished, at the same time, 2 billion people are overweight - and these numbers are rising. We call on the agriculture ministers at the GFFA to put a final stop these mistaken developments in agricultural trade.

We are convinced that peasant agriculture is the future of world nutrition. This requires a reversal of the current trend: We need to stop losing farms. We need more peasant farms, and a radical change in current agricultural trade policy.

We need agricultural trade policy that is based on the Right to Food, and that implements the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas. At the same time, agricultural trade policy must confront the challenges of our time. It must enable farms in all regions of the world to react to the challenges of the climate and biodiversity crisis. In the context of a comprehensive transformation to agroecology and peasant agriculture, regional distribution channels and cycles must be re-strengthened. To this end, it must be made possible to protect markets quickly and effectively against unfair competition. At the same time, trade policy must help to solve the problems in the global nutrition system for a “Planetary Health Diet”<sup>1</sup>: a diet that protects the health of people and the earth in equal measure.

Our demands:

- An agricultural trade system based on the Right to Food, anchored in the United Nations, that aligns its rules with the UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS).
- Fair prices worldwide: Appreciation of peasant work is shown through fair prices for farming produce. Ruinous prices are ruining our farms. This must stop, and dumping prices must be forbidden. EU market regulation must be changed, to make it possible to swiftly combat severe market crises due to surpluses that exert pressure on prices.
- Mercosur and other free trade agreements should be stopped, and existing agreements should be reformed along the lines of these demands. EU agricultural export policy with dumping prices also destroys the livelihoods of our fellow farmers in other parts of the world. Agricultural external trade and imports should be qualified as defined in the first demand. At the same time, multinational companies must finally be held accountable for human rights abuses and environmental damage.
- During its EU presidency, the German federal government must work to ensure that no EU trade policy decisions are made that interfere with peasant food production, damage local and regional economic cycles, or threaten agroecological systems. Trade policy must be consistent with the Right to Food.
- The current trade policy adopted by the WTO, which has relegated food to the level of agricultural commodities, has failed. If agricultural trade is not conceived and controlled from the perspective of the relevant local food systems, on the basis of the human Right to Food, it will be impossible to overcome hunger and malnutrition. The Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition, to be adopted in October 2020 by the CFS, must

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<sup>1</sup> Eat Lancet: <https://eatforum.org/eat-lancet-commission/>  
<https://www.bzfe.de/inhalt/planetary-health-diet-33656.html>

contain clear recommendations for trade policy that can immediately be applied in agricultural trade. These guidelines are expected to clearly strengthen regional marketing, particularly of fruit and vegetables, and to strengthen a wide diversity of agricultural production systems based on agroecology.

- Old and new genetic engineering technologies (like CRISPR) are risk technologies, that have unpredictable consequences for our agricultural systems, food systems, and ecosystems. They must not be released and traded in an uncontrolled and irretrievable way; they must rather be subjected to a risk survey and assessment, and they must be labelled and traceable. This is the only way for consumers, farmers, livestock farmers and distributors to have the freedom of choice, and only in this way the precautionary principle is guaranteed. The GFFA must push for binding regulation and labelling of new genetic engineering technologies (such as CRISPR) in agricultural trade.
- Digital trading of food must not be left in the hands of Alibaba and Amazon. A clear and strict regulation of digitalisation in agriculture, to the benefit of farmers and consumers, particularly with regard to online trading of food, must be at the core the framework of the Digital Council within the FAO.
- Patenting of life and trade with patented life must be stopped for ethical and economic reasons. Life cannot be owned. The right of peasants to replant their harvest, and to exchange and sell seed, must be respected internationally on the basis of the FAO Seed Treaty. Anything else means a limitation of agricultural trade at the expense of farmers and users.
- A fundamental reform of EU agricultural policy: It is unjustifiable to continue as before with a flat-rate direct payment for each hectare. EU direct payments must do justice to farmers' contributions to protection of the climate, biodiversity and the environment – for example through a points-based system – with targeted payments. Varied peasant farming structures, which promote biodiversity, should be strengthened through higher funding for the first hectares.
- Clear aims should be set for protecting the environment, climate, and biodiversity, in European agriculture. Specifically, it must be worthwhile and obligatory to use a wide variety of crop rotations, to cultivate climate-friendly and soil-friendly protein plants, like peas, broad beans and lupins, and to reduce use of fertilisers and pesticides. Only when these demands are legally binding and implemented it can be ensure that the retail and trade sector cover finally their part of the costs, and existing EU agricultural policy funds can finally be spent as “public money for public goods”.
- The land belongs in the hands of peasant farmers. Land is not a commodity for speculation: An agrarian structure law is needed in Germany, and the law on property transfer must be changed, to stop the advance of non-farming capital in landownership. Consistent international action is needed against

land grabbing, and the articles of the declaration on peasants' rights must be implemented immediately.

- The expansion of agricultural land and grassland at the expense of forest and savannah must be stopped.

Today, again many young farmers and many young people are taking part in these demonstrations. It is on you to open up opportunities for young people in particular to live a decent life as farmers. Through your political actions, ensure that there is steady progress along the path towards social justice and conscious handling of our livelihoods – in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe.

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