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European Organisation of Agricultural, Rural and Forestry Contractors

Confédération Européenne des Entrepreneurs de Travaux Techniques Agricoles, Ruraux et Forestiers

Europäischer Zentralverband der land- und forstwirtschaftlichen Lohnunternehmer und ländlichen Dienstleistungsunternehmer

**Professor Peter Strohschneider**

**Chair of the Strategic Dialogue on the Future of EU Agriculture**

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Brussels, 13 March 2024,

Dear Professor,

I refer to your letter from 28<sup>th</sup> February 2024, in which you ask for our organisations' contribution to the Strategic Dialogue on the Future of Agriculture in the European Union.

The European Organisation of Agricultural, Rural and Forestry Contractors (CEETTAR) think that the innovative approaches taken by contractors is already, but not sufficiently, taken into consideration in the current debate. The contractors' innovative practices create a bridge between environmental protection and food production.

Over the last few years, there have been many attempts to oppose visions on agriculture and reduce the agri-food chain to a political playground. For this reason, CEETTAR wishes to put things straight, by answering the questions mentioned in your letter as follows.

*How can we give our farmers and the rural communities a better perspective, including a fair standard of living?*

Farmers and contractors' economic relations are ruled by principles like those underpinning the sharing economy. Contractors provide farmers with precision agriculture solutions, regardless of the size of the farm. For instance, while using more sustainable plant protection products and fertilisers, contractors can limit spray drift through specialised spraying technologies.

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*How can we support agriculture within the boundaries of our planet and its ecosystem?*

We can support agriculture by fostering sustainable growth opportunity for the entire value chain. CEETTAR wants to see the EU precautionary principle balanced with an EU innovation principle, in order to create win-win situation between all actors. The debate should be directed towards a more optimistic approach. As an example, we need to support new genomic techniques.

Contractors also want to facilitate decarbonisation of their activities; through the development of alternative fuel to fossil fuel. This does not only include electrification of the fleet and the use of renewable and low carbon fuels, but also the smart use of machinery to increase energy efficiency. The mission for the future is still to maximise yields, but also to maximize environment protection.

*How can we make better use of the immense opportunities offered by knowledge and technological innovation?*

Contractors all over Europe are already tackling the problem head-on, with the technology and know how to use best practices, combining economic performance with environmental protection. In agriculture, we need to stimulate the use and not the purchase of technology by farmers, to ensure the largest implantation of climate friendly solutions. By stimulating the use of these technologies, we make them available for all EU farmers, large or small. Even if farmers with small-size exploitations cannot afford to purchase a million euro machine, they can buy the service from a neighbouring farmer or an agricultural contractor, who specialises in high-tech agricultural work. Even if large farms can buy regularly used technologies, they may still find it necessary to use specialised technologies.

By giving further support to farmers to hire contractors' services, the EU support programmes – above all the Common Agriculture Policy, in particular through the eco-schemes – are going in the right direction, upon the condition that they support the use of new environmentally friendly technologies, and not the purchasing of machineries by farmers. CEETTAR, together with CEMA, the association representing the European agricultural machinery industry, proposed the CAP to set up a new and innovative incentive in the form of a “smart

technologies voucher”, to be allocated to farmers and forest owners and to be released by contractors<sup>1</sup>.

In addition to this, we need to ensure a safe and secure handling of agriculture machinery, by ensuring the development of artificial intelligence and connected devices, such as the ones already used by contractors.

We need to ensure a guaranteed access right to machinery data for contractors, to ensure a level playing field with farmers and machinery producers. It is also important to ensure the transferability of data between actors, as well as the portability of data between machinery. We also need to make agriculture equipment secure and make sure they are not stolen by thefts.

*How can we promote a bright and thriving future for Europe’s food system in a competitive world?*

We need to change the image of the agricultural sector, by showing how European agriculture has proven its adaptability towards history, and by showing how it can face the current world challenges. We need to outreach young people to choose a career in the sector and support continuous vocational training and digital skills empowerment.

CEETTAR also proposes a EU driving licence for agriculture and forestry vehicles, which is recognised by all EU member states, and which applies without discrimination to all actors of the agriculture value chain (farmers and contractors included). CEETTAR proposes a two-tier (T1 and T) driving licence for agriculture and forestry machinery. The T1 tier is adapted for small farming activities, such as feed loading machines and cattle farms, whereas the T2 tier is valid for heavier and faster agriculture and forestry vehicles and for yellow machines (Non Road Mobile Machinery). For each of these tiers, there should be different speed and capacity limitations <sup>2</sup>.

Finally, CEETTAR wants to liaise the primary sector with the industry at the end of the value chain. The European Commission set precision agriculture and innovation as one of the priorities for the future of the sector. Contractors provide

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<sup>1</sup> The full proposal is available on the CEETTAR website: <http://tinyurl.com/mu5ywxw>

<sup>2</sup> The full proposal is available on the CEETTAR website: <http://tinyurl.com/2z56fj6x>

farmers with precision agriculture solutions, regardless of the size of the farm, and help them integrate the entire food value chain.

I hope these words of explanation will led to the inclusion of CEETTAR's proposals in the Strategic Dialogue on the Future of Agriculture in the European Union.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Klaus Pentzlin', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Klaus Pentzlin  
President of CEETTAR