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European elections 2019

Key priorities of the German Farmers' Association (DBV)
for a modern and diverse agricultural sector in
Germany and Europe

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Preamble

On 26th May 2019, citizens will be called to vote for a new European Parliament. In these times of an unresolved Brexit, a post-2021 budget that has yet to be adopted, and a sustained surge of populism and Euroscepticism, the election of the future Members of the European Parliament is of utmost importance.

Many of the EU's achievements, which are taken for granted even by a number of farming families, are again being called into question at political level by certain players today. These include the EU single market as a whole, the euro as well as the CAP – the EU's Common Agricultural Policy.

The German Farmers' Association is committed to Europe. Farmers spurred, endorsed and promoted European unification, and they will continue to support a European Union that stands for peace, freedom, solidarity and economic freedom as well as one that values European and German farming families.

The DBV's key concerns for the 2019 European elections

1. The DBV calls for a strong and forward-looking EU financial framework and at least a stable CAP budget so that the EU can meet the growing challenges head on. The framework should also include compensation for the financial consequences of Brexit, which must not be borne by the European agricultural policy.
2. The DBV calls for further development of the EU agricultural policy based on agricultural practice, so that besides fostering society's contribution to resource conservation, it also continues to support farmers' incomes.
3. The DBV calls for a commitment to resource-efficient and modern agriculture. This includes the responsible and sustainable use of plant protection products, the further development of breeding techniques and better use of the potential of digitalisation.
4. The DBV demands a balanced trade policy which makes the most of the opportunities for European producers and protects sensitive markets and products. International trade agreements must set European standards as the benchmark.

5. The DBV calls for the EU single market to be strengthened. In particular, unfair competition within the EU should continue to be stamped out, strengthening the market and competitive position of farmers, and further developing food labelling.
6. The DBV demands a level playing field for animal husbandry in the EU, which must reconcile societal demands with viable and sustainable food production in Europe.
7. The DBV calls for farmers' contributions to climate protection to be recognised and credited to the agricultural sector. With the "Climate Strategy 2.0", German farmers are setting themselves ambitious goals to step up climate protection efforts in agriculture and reduce their own emissions. Policymakers and society must support the farming sector in these efforts.
8. The DBV demands that cooperation with the agricultural sector to protect nature and species take precedence over regulatory provisions, and that an incentive component be introduced. Moreover, the conservation status of species that are no longer endangered thanks to successful nature conservation activities must be reviewed.
9. The DBV calls for water conservation and air quality management in agriculture to be carried out with a sense of proportion, and for solutions to be found to conflicting objectives. The burden of achieving the objectives in Europe must be more evenly distributed among the Member States, and Member States must be given more flexibility in attaining the goals.

1. Fresh money for new tasks

The EU faces demanding challenges. Regardless of Brexit, the EU budget must first and foremost guarantee a sound financial basis to the CAP and the structural policies. At the same time, we must recognise that the European Union has to fulfil and finance new, additional priorities.

More money for new tasks

- In order to meet new and ambitious challenges, the DBV calls for additional funding under the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2021-2027.
- The EU Commission's proposed increase of the existing cap on the overall EU budget to a total of 1.114 percent of gross national income (GNI) is not sufficient. The DBV welcomes the European Parliament's proposal to significantly raise the GNI expenditure ceiling to a total of 1.3 percent of GNI.
- Financial gaps resulting from Brexit and from the funding of numerous additional priorities with "European added value" must not be plugged at the expense of the European agricultural policy.

A stable agricultural budget for both pillars

- The DBV demands that the MFF 2021-2027 maintain the budget for both pillars of the CAP at least at its current level. With a smaller budget, farmers cannot achieve the extensive goals set by the EU, nor can they provide the services demanded by society in areas such as climate and environmental protection. In such a scenario, there would be no scope whatsoever for farmers to provide further services to society.
- The proposed painful cuts for agriculture and rural areas mean a nominal decline (i.e. in current prices, without adjustment for inflation) of 5 percent in the EU agricultural budget. This does not do justice to the importance of the agricultural sector and rural areas for jobs and value creation in Europe. The resulting cuts to direct payments would be entirely at the expense of farmers' incomes and their competitiveness.
- The existing agricultural crisis reserve of around 400 million euros is set to be continued in the future as an "agricultural reserve". This should be financed outside the first pillar and therefore should not be to the detriment of direct payments.
- By autumn 2019 at the latest, farmers must know how EU agricultural support will continue from the 2020 claim year. As in previous programming periods, reliable transitional arrangements must be made in good time.

Making better use of the research budget and Erasmus for the benefit of agriculture

- The DBV wholeheartedly welcomes the proposed significant increase in the funding dedicated to the "food and natural resources" cluster in the Horizon 2021-2027 framework programme for research and innovation. However, it is important to ensure that the challenges facing the agri-food sector are adequately addressed. Research and innovation in the food chain must continue to be developed as a central part of the EU agricultural research policy.
- The international exchange of young people as part of agricultural education is becoming increasingly important for all players and should be promoted even further in the future. The Erasmus+ programme should cover all aspects of agricultural professional training (dual training, vocational training, lifelong and in-service training) and its implementation should be unbureaucratic and practical. Programmes such as Erasmus contribute significantly to European integration.

2. A strong EU agricultural policy post 2020

The CAP is of paramount importance across Europe for around 12 million agricultural holdings which, together with the upstream and downstream sectors, provide approximately 44 million jobs. The CAP is also the cornerstone of European integration, and offers extensive added value for the EU. It is vital to the existence of German and European agriculture. It ensures the economic stability of farms in open and volatile markets, fosters their competitiveness, promotes sustainable and comprehensive land management, and strengthens the attractiveness and vitality of rural areas. The CAP also guarantees a well-functioning EU single market that offers over 500 million consumers a unique, affordable and safe range and quality of food. The CAP thus does justice to the principle of "public money for services demanded by society".

Striking a balance between the CAP objectives

- A strong CAP is indispensable for a successful agricultural sector throughout Germany and Europe. Consequently, the CAP must, even after 2020, continue to be designed in such a way as to enable and promote sustainable and competitive agriculture.
- Safeguarding farming and the diverse services it provides to society must remain the key objective of the CAP. It must stand for economic, ecological and social sustainability in equal measure.
- The DBV shares the CAP objectives outlined by the EU Commission, but cautions that farmers cannot meet the demand to step up their societal contribution with a smaller budget.
- For German and European farmers, a workable balance between environmental requirements, economic viability and simplification is key to the future CAP.

Seizing the opportunities of the new delivery model

- The DBV sees the “new delivery model” proposed by the EU Commission for the CAP post 2020 as an opportunity to make EU agricultural support more effective and simpler for farmers. It is up to the Council and Parliament to set the course so that the design of the national CAP strategic plans also leads to real simplification for farmers.
- The DBV demands that with the “new delivery model”, the principle of a common first pillar is in no way undermined and that no new distortion in support arises between EU Member States. Ensuring a comparable level of requirements in the national CAP strategic plans is particularly important in this respect.
- The future design of the “new green architecture” also plays a central role. From the DBV's point of view, a practicable approach which focuses on generating real benefits is the key to the CAP's success. However, the DBV cautions against pushing beyond what is affordable for farms in the discussions on the “new green architecture”. Instead of excessive red tape, incentives, recognition of the contribution made and thus voluntary measures should determine the scope for action.
- Direct payments in the first pillar must continue to support agricultural incomes and compensate for higher EU standards. In this respect, the basic payment must account for at least 60 percent of the first pillar in order to fulfil its role of stabilising all farms directly and effectively.
- We call on the Council and Parliament to reject the EU Commission's proposal to expand the requirements of the first pillar into “new enhanced conditionality” (a kind of “super cross-compliance”) while at the same time reducing the EU agricultural budget. Indeed, this would largely cancel out the effect on income produced by the first pillar and would deprive the “eco-schemes” in the first pillar and possible additional agri-environment-climate measures in the second pillar of room for manoeuvre. Instead, the DBV demands that conditionality be limited to the essentials. Additional requirements should rather be implemented with an income-generating incentive component within the “eco-schemes” or the second pillar.
- In principle, the “new delivery model” must allow EU Member States to decide for themselves how they want to combine “eco-schemes” with agri-environment-climate measures in their strategic plans. The DBV therefore calls for flexibility and room for manoeuvre for Member

States in implementing this model, without creating new distortion of competition between EU countries.

Strengthening rural areas and services to society

- The DBV is strongly committed to second pillar support in the CAP, and calls for it to continue and be strengthened as an integral part of the CAP for the period post 2020. Consequently, second pillar funding must, at the very least, remain at the current level, or any cuts must be offset at national level.
- The promotion of investments in agriculture and agricultural structures, the compensatory allowance for areas facing natural constraints, and remuneration for the environmental and nature conservation measures implemented by farmers must continue to characterise second pillar support in the future. Support for the setting up of young farmers must be increased.
- Agri-environmental measures must include an incentive component that generates income. Farmers' contributions to environmental protection must be established as an attractive branch of business – mere compensation for disadvantages is not sufficient.
- Reliable support for conversion to and maintenance of organic farming practices must continue to be guaranteed. The planned “eco-schemes” must not jeopardise the remuneration of organic farmers for their services.
- Support for risk management tools must remain at national level in the future.

Stabilising market organisations and equipping them for the future

- The common market organisation (CMO) under the CAP must remain market-oriented. The DBV rejects proposals aimed at establishing new quantitative limits for public intervention. Intervention has proven itself as a crisis instrument, providing an extensive safety net; it must be maintained in this form.
- The CMO must be adapted in such a way as to eliminate the profound lack of transparency in the way in which the shares of added value are distributed between the stages of the food supply chain.
- At producer level, more opportunities for producer organisations to concentrate supply and consult each other need to be created in order to increase the share of added value for farmers.
- The DBV calls for the limits to concentration for producer organisations to be raised.

3. Resource-efficient and modern farming for Europe

The DBV is committed to agriculture that uses resources efficiently and applies modern production methods. Farmers are thus aware of their responsibility when using plant protection products. In Germany and Europe, plant protection products are approved through a strict, world-renowned authorisation procedure. The scientific community considers new breeding techniques to have huge potential, especially in the area of resource conservation. The European Court of Justice's ruling on 25th July 2018 equated these techniques with conventional genetic engineering. As a result, despite their potential in the areas of sustainability and efficiency, these techniques

can hardly be used in European agriculture. Digitalisation – which is constantly evolving in many areas of everyday life and the economy – holds real promise for agriculture. Compared with other sectors, the farming sector is already considered widely digitalised. However, significant progress can and must still be made in the coming years in the areas of resource conservation and effectiveness. The use of new technologies should therefore continue to be supported.

Ongoing sustainable development of crop protection

- The authorisation and use of chemical plant protection products must be assessed scientifically and case by case. In the current debate on greater transparency in the authorisation procedure, the basis for the use of plant protection products and the competitiveness of agricultural holdings must be maintained.
- Developing alternatives to chemical plant protection products, which are easy to apply in practice and have broad uses, is equally essential.
- In the public debate on the hazard posed by plant protection products to bees, a distinction must be made between the individual active substances; the actual risk involved in applying these products must also be better differentiated. The positive contribution of chemical plant protection measures to protecting resources and the climate must be taken into greater consideration in the controversial discussion on these farming practices.

Facilitating the use of new breeding techniques

- The legal framework for genetic engineering needs to be adapted so that plant breeding in Europe can stay competitive in the future and can take into account the latest developments.
- In particular, small and medium-sized breeding companies, which are predominant in Germany, must not be weakened or excluded by European regulation. If requirements are too rigorous, the EU will not be able to benefit from the huge potential that new breeding techniques offer for consumers and the environment.

Taking greater advantage of digitalisation

- Digitalisation in farming makes it possible to better understand what plants need in terms of nutrients and plant protection products, and what animals need to ensure their best possible health and welfare. It can promote biodiversity and help reduce red tape. Digitalisation also offers potential benefits for the entire food supply chain, right through to the consumer, by improving the level of information and knowledge about food production, creating transparency and building trust.
- The EU agricultural policy must see the digitalisation of agriculture as a golden opportunity and should therefore lay the groundwork for digital infrastructure and digital applications.

Implementing the new EU organic regulation hand in hand with stakeholders

- When drafting the outstanding legislative acts and implementing regulations, the Commission must give stakeholders in the Member States ample opportunity to express their views.
- The coexistence of conventional and organic farms must not be jeopardised by EU requirements, especially in the case of small-scale structures.

4. A balanced trade policy for consumers and agriculture

Worldwide, the EU is the largest importer and exporter of agricultural goods and foodstuffs and is therefore a major player in international agricultural trade. The EU is increasingly linked with third countries through trade agreements. Currently, the EU is negotiating new comprehensive free trade agreements with many countries from across the world, which will naturally also have an impact on German and European agriculture. The DBV is committed in principle to trade and is open to EU trade agreements with third countries, but at the same time expects high EU standards to be respected. Besides the elimination of tariffs, in recent years additional agreements on technical trade barriers, production and environment standards, services or on the protection of intellectual property have grown in importance. In addition, food security remains a political and moral imperative. Although considerable progress has been made worldwide since the turn of the millennium in the fight against hunger, the world still faces great challenges in terms of feeding its population. In this way, international trade is also a key to securing food for a growing global population.

Gauging opportunities and risks for the agricultural sector

- Free trade agreements must be balanced and fair. Offensive interests (more export opportunities) and defensive interests (protection against imports) should be carefully weighed up against one another. Every trade agreement must be considered on an individual basis.
- In doing so, sensitive products must be adequately protected.
- EU negotiations with the Mercosur bloc are viewed exceptionally critically.

Setting European standards as the international benchmark

- It is imperative that high European standards, such as those related to the environment, climate and consumer protection, be safeguarded in free trade agreements.
- The EU should clearly state that it also wants to establish its standards as a benchmark internationally. This applies in particular to products originating from ecological production.
- EU geographical protection schemes with their protected designation of origin (PDO), protected geographical indication (PGI) and traditional speciality guaranteed (TSG) must be included in new trade agreements and be renegotiated in current agreements.

Assuming responsibility for global food production

- With its Common Agricultural Policy and trade policy, the EU has a duty to protect European agriculture and to offset the costs resulting from high European requirement levels, so that agriculture can make its important contribution to feeding the world's population.
- The EU as well as the Member States should support farmers in developing countries and in countries with economies in transition, through so-called "Farmer Empowering", to set up agricultural organisations and thus give farmers a louder voice in the political decision-making process.

5. For a stronger European single market

For many years, there have been growing imbalances in the bargaining power of players between the individual stages of the food supply chain. The increasingly concentrated food retail sector leads to an even greater bargaining pressure being exerted upon the upstream stages. This is ultimately borne by farmers who have the weakest bargaining position in the value chain. The Directive on unfair trading practices (UTP) marked an important first step and created a binding minimum regulation against the abuse of buying power for the food supply chain. Furthermore, many consumers today want to know where their food comes from. This legitimate request can be fulfilled by indicating the origin of agricultural raw material. Moreover, naming origin is also associated with improved sales opportunities. Aside from the binding EU origin labelling for individual food groups, there are therefore numerous national initiatives on voluntary indication of food origin, such as the EU geographical protection schemes.

A level playing field for all farmers in the EU

- The DBV insists on comparable conditions for all farmers in the internal market. Here it is a matter of preventing Member States from drifting further apart.
- While subsidiarity in implementation and administration makes sense, particularly with regard to the design of the CAP post 2020, basic elements and conception must be designed in a uniform fashion, so as not to call into question the common market.
- The DBV calls for coupled payments to be abolished across the EU.

Strengthening the market and competitive position of farmers

- Buying power should not be misused by highly concentrated food retail and individual domains in the food industry.
- Minimum regulations are needed to strengthen the bargaining position of the producer and to address problematic trading practices in the food supply chain.
- The European Directive prohibiting unfair trading practices, which is yet to be adopted, therefore needs to be effectively implemented in the Member States.

Food labelling: preventing deception

- The DBV calls for a labelling law that protects consumers from being misled and prevents cost disadvantages for economic operators. It is not a question of distinguishing between “healthy” and “unhealthy” food or “good” and “bad” food, but rather of countering unbalanced diets. Instead of nutritional traffic light colour coding, investments in nutritional education are more targeted, provided that the content is based on science.
- There must be clarity on the labelling of vegetarian and vegan meat substitutes, i.e. no meat terms to be used for alternative products and similar protection to be granted to milk and dairy product terms.
- At European level, conditions for EU-wide labelling relating to the method of rearing for meat and meat products need to be created in order to be able to make the varying animal welfare standards in the EU more visible to consumers.

Further developing origin labelling

- The registration procedure for EU geographical protection schemes must be simplified.
- German farmers stand by the food they produce which is of the highest quality. The labelling of geographical origin is thereby also proof of quality. For numerous product groups, indication of origin is now obligatory. German farmers are in favour of comprehensive origin labelling.

6. Leading European livestock farming into the future

European farmers are world leaders in the practical implementation of animal protection and welfare on farms. The breadth of the discussion being held in the various Member States, however, varies considerably. Consequently, the standards from one Member State to the next vary significantly. Moreover, European producers must deal with world market conditions which, in part, differ enormously from those within the EU. Nevertheless, parts of society do not agree with current European farming conditions and are pushing for far-reaching changes. Despite having been significantly reduced, the use of antibiotics in livestock farming is also criticised. Farmers have to face these demands. As globalisation increases, animal health aspects and the spread of animal diseases are also coming further to the fore.

Animal protection and welfare: a level playing field for livestock owners in the EU

- The DBV calls for a joint further development of livestock farming in the EU with the involvement of all relevant players. A level playing field must apply across Europe. Requirements must be consistently implemented in all Member States. The current systems in animal husbandry must be developed further without causing any structural breaks. Besides new innovation, the viability of farms and planning security must be provided. An impact assessment is urgently needed prior to bans, especially with non-curative interventions.
- Interests or conflicting objectives, e.g. between animal welfare and climate protection, must be assessed and resolved.
- When using antibiotics in animal husbandry, a fact-based investigation, in which the factual links are clearly portrayed, is needed. The “One Health” approach must be pursued by all those involved, not just by farmers.
- Imports of animal food products from third countries must comply with European production and processing standards.
- In order to maintain the competitiveness of German agriculture, further development must be accompanied by investment support, simpler approval procedures and sufficient transition periods.

More cooperation on animal health and dealing with disease

- The DBV calls for common strategies on preventing and combatting disease to be developed. Besides prevention, this also includes shaping legally watertight export opportunities, developing a European vaccination strategy and, in the event of an epidemic, regionalisation and damage mitigation.

7. Recognising agriculture's efforts and specific role in climate protection

Agriculture is the only sector whose production can contribute to protecting the climate, by cultivating renewable raw materials, producing renewable energies, expanding carbon sinks in the soil and preventing fossil emissions of other sectors.

Harnessing the potential of climate protection, renewable energies and the circular economy

- Due to food security, the specific role that agriculture plays in climate protection, must, in accordance with the Paris climate agreement, form the basis of all climate policy.
- Climate policy must not jeopardise food security and agricultural adaptation to climate change must be guaranteed.
- Agriculture and forestry must be given credit for their climate protection efforts. Solely focussing on the emissions of the sector would not be fair to agriculture's climate efforts.
- The preservation and promotion of humus in the soil must be taken into account in the future CAP through appropriate support measures.
- In the interest of climate protection in transport, a fundamental review of the biofuel policy is needed. This should recognise the positive climate protection performance of biofuels based on sustainable renewable raw materials, renewable energies and agricultural residues in Europe, and take into account by-products.

8. Nature and species conservation must rely on cooperation

Agriculture is economically active in and together with nature and is in this respect incomparable with other economic sectors. Farmers themselves have a great interest in biodiversity and are increasingly committing themselves to protecting species and habitats. This is because agriculture and forestry are particularly dependent on the functioning of the ecosystem and above all on the pollination efforts of insects. Protecting nature and species through regulatory provisions is, however, not the most promising approach. This is because mounting requirements are increasingly restricting the economy and development opportunities in and around NATURA 2000 areas are being lost. Rigid regulatory provisions, a lack of flexibility, excessive red tape as well as counterproductive requirements are undermining useful nature conservation measures. Agriculture, forestry and the fishing industry are being hit hard by excessively stringent protection measures for specially protected species, such as the wolf, beaver, otter, wild goose and many others.

Nature and species conservation must be compatible with agriculture

- Nature conservation in agriculture needs to be fundamentally readjusted with a programme to promote voluntary and collaborative nature conservation measures and with the introduction of incentive components, such as the principle of "temporary nature conservation".

- At European level, it should be enshrined in nature conservation law that cooperation with agriculture in nature conservation takes precedence over regulatory provisions and is based on the principle of “protection through use”.
- The European nature conservation law needs to be re-examined and adapted. Species, whose conservation status is deemed to be favourable – e.g. the wolf – should be transferred from Annex IV to Annex V. In addition, a mechanism needs to be created that involves lowering the level of protection when successful nature conservation efforts are achieved. To guarantee the acceptance of strict species conservation in the framework of NATURA 2000, possible opportunities to control the species need to be clarified early on.
- The European law on the conservation of species permits measures to protect against agriculture damage, provided that the species retains a favourable conservation status. This legal status can and should be used for flexible population management with the help of population monitoring.

9. Responsible and measured water conservation and air quality management

In water conservation, the strict objectives of comprehensive drinking water protection are increasingly calling into question the appropriate use of fertiliser for food production. There are also increasing conflicting objectives in the field of air quality management, notably with animal welfare, which need to be weighed up.

New fertiliser law will lead to improvements in Germany

- When implementing the Nitrates Directive, the European Commission should grant Member States more flexibility in order to achieve the water conservation objectives.
- Germany must be given the chance to implement the new fertiliser law and allow it to unfold. Planning security is required for the farmer when implementing the European Nitrates Directive at national level. Sufficient plant nutrient supply must continue to be the basis of the fertiliser law.

Cooperation in water conservation without additional regulatory provisions

- When reviewing the Water Framework Directive, cooperation between agriculture and water conservation must be more heavily promoted. The regulatory provisions on the Nitrate, Groundwater and Water Framework Directive have reached their limits. Voluntary water partnerships and agri-environmental programmes, however, constitute a promising approach. This is the only way to ensure that players involved remain accepting and motivated.
- More time is needed to implement the Water Framework Directive in the Member States. This is because the deadlines were unrealistic from the outset. Furthermore, following this the Water Framework Directive must be fundamentally reviewed. In this way, the “one out all out” principle is not well suited to achieving a balanced view of the goals and the progress made. Moreover, there needs to be a realistic assessment of the objectives and the exemptions for less stringent objectives.

Air quality management should not call into question animal welfare or livestock farming

- Air quality management requirements should not contradict efforts to continue to improve animal welfare. Animal welfare must take precedence over the reduction of emissions. The efforts to improve animal welfare should, however, not have the effect of tightening a Member State's objectives in the framework of the Directive on National Emission Reduction Commitments (NERC).
- Effort sharing in reduction objectives, inter alia for ammonia, between EU Member States in the NERC Directive is not balanced and needs to be fundamentally reviewed.