



Brussels, 21 June 2024

To: Mr. Charles Michel, President of the European Council

Subject: Strengthening the “Draft Strategic Agenda 2024-2029” - A Call from the ECI “Save Bees and Farmers!”

Dear President Michel, dear permanent representations,

On behalf of the European Citizens' Initiative "[Save Bees and Farmers!](#)", we are writing to express our support for a robust "Strategic Agenda 2024-2029" that successfully addresses key issues that relate to universal human rights, including that to food, health as well as to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment. With this letter we would like to bring to your attention some key issues to further strengthen the current draft.

The Initiative represents 1,1 million European citizens, and more than 200 European organisations, supporting the goals to reduce the use of harmful pesticides and replace them with safer alternative methods, protecting in this way the health of farmers, families living in agricultural zones as well as ecosystem services and biodiversity. It has gathered significant public support, underscoring the importance of supporting farmers in their transition toward sustainable systems that embrace the principles of Integrated Pest Management and agroecology.

On behalf of the signatories of the Initiative, we are pleased to see the Council's commitment to continue to protect nature and reverse the degradation of ecosystems, which perfectly aligns with our goals. A healthy environment is fundamental for sustainable agriculture and crucial for food security. Given the urgency of addressing climate change, which the Agenda acknowledges is causing "increasing damage and disruption" to our natural environment, it is vital to preserve nature's ability to regenerate. Therefore, building a robust and sustainable agricultural sector to withstand climate change impacts is essential.

We welcome that the agenda reflects the Union's commitment to tackling numerous contemporary challenges, including geopolitical tensions, economic competitiveness, and the transition towards a green future. We also applaud the emphasis on a coordinated approach with a focus on implementation and enforcement of agreed policies. This is essential for ensuring that existing environmental regulations are effectively translated into action. Moreover, the shift towards defining food security through the lens of "sustainable and resilient agricultural sector" is a change

in the right direction. This aligns with our vision for a European agricultural system that prioritises both, food production, as well as the preservation of the environment and biodiversity restoration.

While we welcome several aspects of the Agenda, we believe it can be further strengthened by addressing some critical issues that will enable a true transformation of the agricultural systems, in line with the demands of the ECI "Save Bees and Farmers!".

To align the Draft Strategic Agenda 2024-2029 with the universal human rights and critical environmental goals of our initiative, we propose the following amendments and additions:

- **Pollution:** The current environmental challenges include not only climate change and biodiversity loss, but also widespread pollution of our air, water, soil and food, as well as our bodies. Many of these pollutants are pesticides, which negatively impact the health of bees, farmers, EU citizens and the entire food system. The ECI "Save Bees and Farmers!" specifically calls for a significant reduction in pesticide use. We urge our policy and decision makers to prioritise policies that promote a transition towards sustainable farming practices that minimise pollution and ensure healthy ecosystems. The link between pollution, nature loss, biodiversity degradation, and ultimately, food security, needs to be explicitly recognised in the Agenda.
- **Endorsing the Paris Agreement and the Kunming Declaration:** The Agenda can be significantly strengthened by explicitly referencing and integrating key provisions from two landmark international agreements. These agreements highlight the need for ensuring the integrity of all ecosystems and protection of biodiversity.
 - The ECI "Save Bees and Farmers!" aligns with the Paris Agreement's climate. Indeed, reducing agriculture's carbon footprint and capturing carbon in soils can only be achieved through a reduction of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, while promoting non-chemical alternative crop-protection methods that also contribute to enhancing soil carbon.
 - The Kunming Declaration calls for a global reduction of at least 50% in the overall risk of pesticides and other harmful chemicals by 2030. Reflecting this commitment in the Agenda would demonstrate the European Union's leadership on this critical issue and commitment to fulfilling the signed declaration's goals.
- **Endorsing the Global Framework on Chemicals**, that envisages a future free from the dangers of chemicals and waste. This ambitious plan paves the way for a safe, healthy, and sustainable world. The framework recognizes industry and private sectors as key players in achieving this vision, therefore the inclusion of this framework is key for the transition to a safer environment, free from dangerous chemicals.
- **Safe and sustainable chemicals:** The Agenda should promote the use of safe and sustainable alternatives to harmful chemicals in agriculture, as well as in other domains (pharmaceutical products, cleaning products, flame retardants, construction material, etc.). This also aligns with the UN international agreements such as the Paris Agreement, the Kunming Declaration, and Global Framework on Chemicals.
- Recognising **Nature Restoration Law** (NRL) provisions: Recently adopted, NRL aims to find a balance between agricultural productivity and ecological well-being, by promoting practices that improve both agricultural land as well as wildlife habitats. Including

provisions aligned with the Nature Restoration Law will contribute to long-term agricultural stability.

Moreover, the Strategy should provide a reference to the following:

- **Support for farmers during transition** - providing financial and technical support to farmers transitioning to sustainable practices, ensuring they have the necessary resources and knowledge to succeed.
- **Promotion of agroecological practices** - support and incentivise farmers to adopt agroecological practices that prioritise biodiversity restoration, soil health preservation, and sustainable practices
- **Public awareness and educational campaigns** - Public awareness and education campaigns are vital to collecting support for these initiatives. Including such campaigns, aiming to inform citizens about the benefits of sustainable farming practices and the importance of reducing pesticide use to protect biodiversity and public health, will enlarge the network of supporters of the resilient and sustainable farming systems.

By integrating these key issues into the "Draft Strategic Agenda 2024-2029," the European Council can significantly contribute to advancing the Union's environmental and agricultural objectives. These steps are not only essential for meeting the urgent demands to address climate change and biodiversity loss but also for ensuring a sustainable and resilient agricultural sector that supports both food security and ecosystem health.

The "Save Bees and Farmers!" ECI represents the voices of over one million European citizens who care deeply about the future of our food systems and environment. We stand ready to collaborate with the European Council, European Parliament and the Commission to achieve a sustainable and resilient future for European agriculture, aligned with our global commitments.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to a continued constructive dialogue.

Sincerely,

Martin Dermine
Executive director

Pesticide Action Network Europe