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## NOTE

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From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Council
Subject:	Joint Declaration of the Ministers of Agriculture of the Visegrad Group and Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania, and Slovenia on the challenges and opportunities of Member States in relation to EU carbon farming initiatives - <i>Information from the Slovak delegation, on behalf of the Bulgarian, Croatian, Hungarian, Polish, Romanian, Slovak and Slovenian delegations</i>

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Delegations will find:

- In the Annex, an introductory note received from the Slovak delegation on the Joint Declaration of the Ministers of Agriculture of the Visegrad Group and Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania, and Slovenia on the challenges and opportunities of Member States in relation to EU carbon farming initiatives;
- In the Annex to the Annex, the Joint Declaration.

The Joint Declaration will be presented under “Any other business” at the meeting of the “Agriculture and Fisheries” Council on 17-18 October 2022.

**Joint Declaration of the Ministers of Agriculture of the Visegrad Group and Bulgaria,  
Croatia, Romania, and Slovenia on the challenges and opportunities of Member States in  
relation to EU carbon farming initiatives**

On 6 and 7 October 2022, the Slovak Presidency of the Visegrad Group organized the V4+4 Ministerial Meeting in Pezinok, Slovakia. The main topic of the meeting, attended by Commissioner Wojciechowski, was Carbon farming, most precisely the Member States' preparation for the implementation of this concept, as well as sharing of best practices in this area. The Agriculture Ministers of the Visegrad Group, Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania, and Slovenia unequivocally confirmed their interest in developing this new economic model, at the same time, they supported the introduction of the system, which according to them, must be simple, voluntary and must not lead to the disadvantage of farmers. They also emphasized (among others) the important role of restoring water regimes for healthy soils. Moreover, the European Commission was invited to consider alternative sources of carbon farming funding other than the CAP budget.

Bearing all this in mind, the ministers signed a **Joint Declaration of the Ministers of Agriculture of the Visegrad Group and Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania, and Slovenia on the challenges and opportunities of Member States in relation to EU carbon farming initiatives** (Annex to the Annex).

The ministers and Commissioner Wojciechowski also exchanged views on the current situation on the agricultural markets and legislation on the sustainable use of plant protection products.



7 October 2022

**Joint Declaration of the Ministers of Agriculture of the Visegrad Group\* and Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania, and Slovenia on the challenges and opportunities of Member States in relation to EU carbon farming initiatives**

The Ministers of Agriculture of the Visegrad Group\* and Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania and Slovenia HAVING REGARD to the Farm to Fork strategy of 20 May 2020, the Council conclusions of 19 October 2020 on the Farm to Fork strategy, the EU Soil Strategy for 2030 of 17 November 2021, the Communication on Sustainable Carbon Cycles of 15 December 2021, the Council conclusions of 7 April 2022 on sustainable carbon cycles, and the implementation of the new Common Agricultural Policy:

- (1) RECOGNIZE the European Commission's (EC) effort to reach carbon neutrality in the EU by 2050 with the aim of achieving negative emissions thereafter, and ARE AWARE of the fact that achieving the neutrality targets and overall sustainability will require reducing agricultural emissions but also promoting carbon sequestration, soil protection and sustainable soil and water management, at the same time EMPHASIZE the need for strengthening the resilience of European agriculture and the forest sector, and STRESS that ensuring sustainable and sufficient food production and sustainable forest management remains the primary objective of the land-use sectors;
- (2) RECOGNIZE that soils and forests represent the significant terrestrial carbon and water reservoir on the planet, and improved soil and water management and sustainable forest management can significantly contribute to the mitigation and adaptation to climate change;
- (3) EMPHASIZE the important role of restoring water regimes for healthy soil functioning with the key indicators such as water retention capacity, soil organic matter, content and quality, scale of vegetation cover of the soil and soil erosion;
- (4) WELCOME in this respect the EC's ambition to present a legislative proposal in 2022 on the regulatory framework for the certification of reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> removals from the atmosphere in order to scale up carbon farming as a new voluntary environmentally focused business model, capable of providing an additional source of income for farmers, other land managers and foresters, and ENCOURAGE its deployment on EU territory;

\* The Czech Republic does not sign the document officially due to their Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

(5) RECOGNIZE that the establishment of such a certification framework in a way that is fully coherent with other Union's initiatives and objectives and, where possible, compatible with existing national initiatives will be an essential stepping stone towards the transparent recognition and remuneration of activities that sequester CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere, protect carbon in soil, improve the quality of the soil, its water retention capacity, and water use efficiency in an environmentally sound manner;

(6) HIGHLIGHT that even if carbon farming as voluntary incentive provides a great opportunity for land managers, foresters, as well as the environment, several concerns must be resolved, such as financial burdens, access to information and knowledge, regulatory obstacles, high complexity and costs of robust monitoring, the establishment of carbon credit, the timing of payments, availability of carbon credit markets, REMIND also that the carbon farming model must not cause "disproportionate administrative burdens", nor penalise farmers, foresters and land managers for carbon release for instance due to natural disturbances or in another way unjustifiably cause the decrease of their competitiveness in the context of globalized markets;

(7) CALL, therefore, on the EC to present the certification rules which will take into account the specificity of the agricultural sector, along with a respective impact assessment, that set evidence based requirements for quality, realistic and efficient measurement, monitoring, reporting and verification of the CO<sub>2</sub> removed from the atmosphere, the duration of the storage, and address the risk of reversal and the risk of carbon leakage increasing GHG emissions elsewhere, which will eventually lead to increased farmers', land managers' and foresters' interest in participating in carbon farming schemes;

(8) INVITE the EC to explore the other alternative sources of carbon farming funding and co-financing in addition to the Common Agriculture Policy, such as the European Carbon Market, the Emissions Trading System revenues, other forms of public funding, etc;

(9) REITERATE that although the certification framework should bring harmonized and clear rules for interested parties, the practical application of carbon farming is very site-dependent and country specific and there cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach;

(10) EMPHASISE the importance of further innovation and research and targeted advisory services and improving the functioning of Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS) since they are crucial to further scaling the implementation of carbon farming practices on the ground; WELCOME in this regard the EC's intention to establish an expert group in order to examine best practices and existing systems, and INVITE the EC to take into account its outputs when implementing a legislative framework;

(11) ASK the EC to support the development of emerging or existing private and public carbon farming pilot projects demonstrating economically and environmentally sustainable farming models;

(12) Finally, CALL on the EC to consider this declaration when deliver new legislative proposals in this area.



Ministry of Agriculture of Bulgaria



Ministry of Agriculture  
and Rural Development of Romania



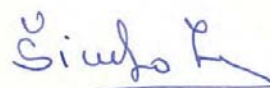
Ministry of Agriculture of Hungary



Ministry of Agriculture and Rural  
Development of Slovakia



Ministry of Agriculture of Croatia



Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food  
of the Republic of Slovenia



Ministry of Agriculture and Rural  
Development of Poland