

BFFE Declaration Hanasaari 26 February 2015

For Protected Waters and Sustainable Food Production

Baltic Farmers' Forum on Environment (BFFE) organized a science-based conference on Agricultural Water Protection and Sustainable Food Production in Hanasaari, Finland on 25-26 February 2015.

Farmers and their representatives from the Baltic Sea Region got together to receive the latest knowledge on the protection of the Baltic Sea, and to update the most burning research needs for the current policy adaptations. By this declaration, farmers highlight their willingness to contribute to environmentally friendly and sustainable agriculture. Similarly, farmers remind about the need of cost-efficient policy for agriculture sector, which ensure soil productivity and food security.

This declaration is a continuation for the first declaration in 1998 in Gotland called "Farmers for a Sustainable Future in The Baltic Sea Region", and BFFE views presented in the HELCOM Ministerial meeting in Copenhagen 2013.

Farmers care for the environment and are willing to further improve their practices

BFFE has been calling for science-based environment policy in the HELCOM meetings where BFFE has an observer status. Farmers care for water quality and are willing to co-operate in order to further improve the status of the Baltic Sea and inland waters. Despite many efforts from farmers' side, the water quality of the Baltic Sea has not improved as expected. This assessment is linked to the fact that most measures were neither practicable nor cost-efficient. Moreover, we feel that the time frame is not realistic.

We are willing to foster water protection as long as food security is not put at risk. Farmers' ultimate task is to produce food in a profitable way and to fulfill the basic needs of the population in the Baltic Sea region. Additionally, we highlight the needs for ensuring food security and for contributing to the mitigation of and adaption to climate change. The principles of climate-smart agriculture must also be in line with the agricultural water policy, which aims to further improve nutrient management from farming practices. Nutrient loads or greenhouse gas emissions are linked to natural processes that can be partly controlled but those are not completely avoidable. Thus, farmers ask for a realistic approach on water protection and climate mitigation that is based on science and good agronomic sense.

Farmers ask for cooperation instead of regulation

Sustainable agriculture balances environmental, social and economic approaches. All pillars are crucial. We highlight that limiting production is not the solution: The answer is resource efficiency and optimal land use.

Food cannot be produced without nutrient losses. However, farmers are willing to further reduce the impacts on environment. We can improve nutrient use efficiency by applying modern technology and better science-based understanding of nutrient cycling.

The current policy framework should support the commitment of farmers to engage in agri-environmental practices and measures, while avoiding additional bureaucracy. By ensuring a competitive agriculture it will also be ensured that farmers can afford to take advantage of the environmentally best available technologies.

Farmers recall evidence-based water and climate policy

Nine farmers' organizations gathered at the BFFE conference in Hanasaari, Espoo, Finland, agreed on common approaches regarding water protection and sustainable food production.

- Internal nutrient load in surface waters needs to be better taken into account when determining nutrient reduction targets and realistic time periods are needed to achieve targets;
- Resource-efficiency and sustainable intensification of the agricultural production are the way forward, investment in new environmentally friendly technology should be fostered and supported;
- Systematic environmental on-farm advisory services should be developed and offered to farmers in all countries;
- More research funds in the area of sustainable food production should be aimed at participatory research. Such projects are fruitful for both farmers and scientists;
- Policies and politics should not endanger agricultural production in the Baltic Sea region. Environmental targets should not lead to moving the food production elsewhere, but by reducing its impact in cost-effective way and ensuring sustainable production;
- Economic incentives from governments are needed to cover additional costs of environmental measures carried out by farmers around the Baltic Sea.

Central Union of Agricultural Producers and Forest Owners (MTK)

The Central Union of Swedish-speaking Agricultural Producers in Finland (SLC)

Danish Agriculture & Food Council (L&F)

Federation of Swedish Farmers (LRF)

Estonian Farmers' Federation (EGFAR)

Latvian Farmers Parliament (ZSA)

German Farmers' Association (DBV)

Farmers Union of Saint-Petersburg Region (SFLOSPB)

Norwegian Farmers' Union (NB)

and supported by European farmers and agri-cooperatives (Copa-Cogeca)

Baltic Farmers' Forum on Environment (BFFE) was launched in April 1998 as an initiative from the Nordic Farmers Council (NBC). The aim is to strengthen the agri-environmental work among the farmer organizations.

More information: www.mtk.fi/bffe.