

European Employee Network Agricultural Machinery

Brussels declaration on Agricultural Machinery

We, representatives of the metalworkers' unions, works councils and workplace union committees at the international, sectoral Future Forum of the European Employee Network Agricultural Machinery in Brussels, have today adopted the following joint declaration:

A strong European agricultural machinery industry is based on strong worker representation

Important employer in the European Union, the European agricultural machinery sector is a significant core segment of Europe's mechanical engineering industry. The European agricultural machinery sector is the largest supplier of agricultural machinery in the world and an innovative sector whose global competitiveness is underpinned by a experienced industrial and service workforce with substantial technical capabilities.

The agricultural machinery sector is an industry of the future. In view of the pressing global challenges associated with food, raw materials and the environment, the importance of agricultural machinery now extends well beyond its traditional role in the agricultural industry and also has a significant bearing on energy and environmental policy.

Europe's agricultural machinery industry is distinguished by strong trade union structures enabling workers' representation. The sector is proof that strong trade union organisation and the involvement of worker representative bodies within the workplace in company decision-making has a positive impact on the development of companies' global competitiveness, management of structural change and innovation.

The appearance of the agricultural machinery sector has altered dramatically in recent years in the wake of globalisation. Production sites in Europe are coming under increased cost and competitive pressure as new competitors enter the market, particularly in Asia. Many companies have responded to this development by relocating their operations and stepping up cross-border collaboration and cooperation, which has contributed to a significant internationalisation of the sector.

However, given the internationalisation of the sector and the increasingly cross-border nature of labour distribution, the predominantly national system of worker representation is no longer sufficient. For this reason, and because the agricultural machinery sector has a high preponderance of small and medium-sized enterprises and the system of European works councils is thus only applicable to a relatively small number of companies, in 2007 works councils, workplace union committees and national metalworkers' federations established the European Employee Network Agricultural Machinery, which is now coordinated by the European Metalworkers' Federation (EMF).

Over the past three years, with financial support from the European Commission, the network has for the first time enabled an exchange of experience, cross-border discussions

and engagement with topics of joint interest as well as the development of joint positions. Without the network, such an exchange would be impossible for colleagues at small and medium-sized enterprises, since no European framework for this interaction has existed until now.

Our demands to safeguard a future-proof and sustainable agricultural machinery sector

- I. Through this exchange, we have discovered that – irrespective of any national differences – we all face similar problems and have to deal with shared challenges. These include the increase in temporary agency work and other forms of work provision other than regular permanent employment, which often entail substantial reductions in income for the workers concerned.
- II. In addition, many of our colleagues on the shop floor report insufficient investment in workers' expertise, skills and qualifications, combined with increasing skills shortages and risks to sites, jobs and manufacturing quality. A sustainable future for the agricultural machinery sector in Europe can only be shaped through its workers. For that reason, we are calling for more training and education opportunities and observance of the individual right to training for all workers in the sector.
- III. Jobs within the EU and outside Europe are often relocated on the basis of incorrectly calculated cost benefits, resulting in long-term risks for existing sites. We see these trends as constituting not only joint challenges for company and sectoral trade-union policy but also significant risks to the further industrial development of Europe's entire agricultural machinery sector.
- IV. In common with other industries, the agricultural machinery sector has been hit hard by the global financial and economic crisis. This has led to some massive falls in turnover and output and to difficult economic realities for many companies, as well as to redundancies. The fact that the past two years have not seen greater job losses and an associated loss of skills is owing in no small measure to company and sectoral worker representative bodies and trade unions. However, the mainly small and medium sized companies in the sector need access to liquidity and financing.
- V. However, possible concessions that have been made by the employees' representations in a bid to preserve jobs must not result in a permanent lowering of working conditions and standards and a sharper increase in precarious employment in our sector in the wake of the crisis. Within the agricultural machinery sector, the markets of the future will not be won by adopting the "ever cheaper" principle. We therefore advocate a philosophy of quality jobs instead of cost-driven labour policies, and demand maintaining know-how in the R&D sectors and in production.
- VI. We believe that social dialogue at company and sectoral level guarantees a socially responsible approach to crisis management and the anticipation of future structural change, both in our countries and throughout Europe. This instrument has proved its worth once again in the current crisis and we are therefore resolutely opposed to any form of erosion and weakening of worker participation at company and national level.

- VII. Social dialogue and worker participation in the form of information and consultation are integral components of the European social model and enshrined as a fundamental right in the Treaty of Lisbon. These components must be respected and expanded in order to safeguard and develop jobs and employment conditions over the long term and boost the innovative competitiveness of Europe's agricultural machinery sector. We condemn firmly all violations of workers' rights in all of Europe.
- VIII. In view of the increasing internationalisation of our sector, the EWC Directive and current and future amendments to it are important for worker representation. However, it is also necessary, given the predominance of SMEs within the sector, that company and trade-union worker representatives from the entire agricultural machinery industry be given the chance to engage in cross-border collaboration: this opportunity must not be confined to employees of large companies. Everybody needs the possibility to be given the right to participate in transnational cooperation.
- IX. The conditions for the future sectoral activities of worker representative bodies require concrete time and financial resources to be found in order to enable this collaboration to take place. In particular, the development of a responsible European policy on social and employment as well as industrial issues, corresponding to EMF's and its affiliated organisations' demands, makes these improved opportunities for the representation of workers' interests essential.
- X. To guarantee the future oriented sector of agricultural machinery and its employment perspectives in Europe, we expect joint initiatives and efforts in the companies, by management and employee representation, as well as appropriate policy frameworks defined by EU-Commission and the EU-Parliament.

In conclusion, the trade unions in the current situation underline their determination to join their struggles on European level, rather than in the framework of national policies. Workers refuse to pay for the crisis they did not cause, and will take appropriate action if needed.

Adapted in Brussels, 11th June 2010