

# Are European Young Farmers finding the new normal?



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As industries have grinded to a halt, factories shut down, and homes turned into offices, schools and day-cares, the work of farmers tending to their land continued, full steam ahead. The agri-food sector, and all actors within it, ensured that grocery shelves remained stocked as consumers rushed to fill their pantries to feed themselves and their loved ones. As I write this article, hotels, restaurants and catering (HoReCa) kitchens across Europe are beginning to dust off their equipment and resume services. The public is slowly returning to a life that echoes the pre-COVID-19 world, and it is clear that it is a new normal we are all embracing. **For many young farmers, this new normal is already a reality as plans have been interrupted, contracts re-defined, and business strategies put to the ultimate test.**

What does it mean for a young person to take over a farm? There is a common misconception that the process is easy, especially for those whose parents are already farmers. The reality is that **it can be an arduous and expensive process** involving loans, debts and endless administrative paperwork.





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The pandemic has accentuated such difficulties by interrupting installation and investment processes. For example, one of our young farmers from Wallonia pointed out how installation administrators are not sure of the conditions which young farmers must meet in order to access installation aid today, nor are they certain that budgets will be available after January 2021. It is crucial that **young people are empowered to take-over farms** as soon as they are able, given their energy to adopt sustainable new practices and business models.

In the absence of the HoReCa sector, **many young farmers have chosen to sell directly to consumers** by establishing new e-commerce systems, creating drive through farmers markets, finding new customers in and around their area, and **moving activities online**. In Germany, wine producers have started online wine tastings where people can pre-order packages of wine and then log on to a meeting; while schools in Finland have begun “Facetime with a Farmer,” to keep educational activities going.

The future of our food systems is in the spotlight, both glorified for its resilience during this pandemic and scrutinized for its impact on the environment. In the shadow of this conversation, is the next generation of farmers, **whose early careers will be shaped by the devastating impacts of the pandemic**, and who will be tasked with assuring a more environmentally sustainable sector that is as or even more resilient in delivering food during crises. This is why it is crucial to facilitate their take-over process, listen to their needs, and **help them find their new normal**.



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