



**TOESPRAAK DOOR KRIS PEETERS VLAAMS MINISTER-PRESIDENT EN  
VLAAMS MINISTER VAN ECONOMIE, BUITENLANDS BELEID,  
LANDBOUW EN PLATTELANDSBELEID**

**SPEECH BY KRIS PEETERS FLEMISH MINISTER-PRESIDENT AND  
FLEMISH MINISTER OF ECONOMY, FOREIGN POLICY,  
AGRICULTURE AND RURAL AFFAIRS**

**World Agricultural Forum  
29 november 2011**

Mister Chairman of the Advisory Board of the World Agricultural Forum,  
Honoured guests,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

Please allow me to first of all welcome all of you to Brussels. As you may know, Brussels is not only the capital of Belgium and Europe, but also of the Flanders region. As minister-president of the Government of Flanders, I am honoured that the World Agricultural Forum has chosen our capital as the location for the first ever edition outside of the United States. And in all modesty, I think you have made the right choice.

Thanks to its status as capital of Europe, Brussels is a very important global decision center, also on agricultural policy. But it is also the capital of a region with strong agricultural activities. Indeed, for many years Flanders has been ranking consistently in the top 5 of most important agricultural regions in Europe.

In 2010, the total production value of Flemish agriculture amounted to 5.1 billion euro. This constitutes an 11% increase compared to 2009 and the highest number in the past decade. This figure corresponds to 75% of total Belgian production value, making our region thé agricultural region of Belgium.

First of all, this is thanks to our high productivity. With 456 inhabitants per square km, Flanders is one of the most densely populated and urbanized regions in the European Union. But at the

same time, in terms of climate and soil properties, the circumstances for agricultural activities are perfect.

And our farmers manage to get the most out of the natural resources we have, without exhausting them. In Flanders, we are convinced that intensive agriculture and sustainability aren't contradictory.

A second reason for our high ranking among agricultural regions, lies in our trade figures. Our location in the heart of Europe means that we can reach all major European markets within a day's travelling. 60% of the EU's purchasing power lies within a 500km radius around Flanders. Adding to this, we have a very extensive logistical network. This includes 4 major international sea ports (in Antwerp, Zeebrugge, Ghent and Ostend) that are global players in the agricultural commodity trade.

Thanks to this, we have a consistent positive trade balance. In 2010 our trade surplus for agricultural products had a value of 3.2 billion euro. In total, our export amounted to 26.5 billion euro, or 81% of Belgian agricultural exports. This ranks us among the 10 largest exporters in the world.

These trade figures include not only agricultural commodities, but also agro-industrial products like fertilizers and machinery.

A third reason for our success as an agricultural region, is the innovative spirit of both farmers and researchers. Our farmers are in general very well educated. Modernization is a crucial factor in their way of doing business.

This is combined with a strong network of private and public research institutions that continuously look for solutions for future challenges. Because indeed, we are very well aware of the many challenges our farmers and our agricultural policy has to deal with.

The past few years have taught us once again that the primary sector is confronted regularly with large price fluctuations. The pigmeat and the dairy sector have known big crises in the past few years. And this summer, our vegetable growers had to deal with the EHEC-crisis, just like their colleagues in the rest of Europe. 5

These crises have convinced me even more that agricultural policy has to focus on risk management. Risk management is the political priority for me in the years to come. Short term measures to mitigate a crisis are useful and necessary, but they are not enough. They are a bandage on the wound, but our priority has to lie in preventing the injury itself. This is why I am in a permanent discussion with the Flemish agricultural sector, in order to find long term solutions together.

At the same time, I am convinced that we have to face the challenges on a larger scale. In the first place, in a European perspective. Flanders firmly believes in the European project and is in a favor of a strong Common Agricultural Policy. In the next two years, we will be actively involved in the discussions on the reform of the CAP. In our view, the proposals of the European

Commission do not focus enough on the basic premise of the CAP: to strive for reasonable prices, stable markets and a reasonable standard of living for our agricultural population. 6

Within the reform of the CAP, a big priority will be given to the so-called “greening” of the European agriculture. I firmly believe that striving for sustainability means that we not only have to focus on the ecological aspects, but also on the economic and social ones. Therefore, the reform should be about rewarding those who perform well. It shouldn’t be a policy of punishing. Moreover, the premiums for these kinds of greening measures should be in line with the efforts farmers have to make.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I will conclude. The challenges that lie ahead for all farmers around the world are large. But I am convinced that a forum like this, a true meeting of the minds, is the right formula for success. I wish you all a very pleasant evening and a fruitful and productive continuation of this edition of the World Agricultural Forum.

I thank you.