

Open letter to the European Parliament

In 2008 money is still a critical factor in access to sufficient food for the poorest sections of the population. If food prices increase sharply due to a change in the world balance of supply and demand, the poorest will be the hardest hit, even in the wealthiest countries of the European Union.

The European Commission has recognised this in their Communication of 20 May on tackling the challenges of rising food prices: *"While the increases in food prices in EU-15 were around 5-7%, they were much higher in the new Member States (21.8% in Bulgaria and 17% in Estonia). This coincides with higher proportion of expenditure for food in household budgets. The percentage of household expenditure goes from 9.06% in the UK to 41.87% in Romania. In addition, the poorest 20% of*

households spend a much higher proportion of their household budget on food. For example, in Romania it is 56.8%, in Lithuania 43.4%, in Bulgaria 42%, in Latvia 38.2%, in Slovakia 30.7%, in Hungary 27.2%."

Up until 2006 incomes of the lowest quintile grew faster than food price inflation, but recent price pressures have brought to an end the era of 'cheap food'. Those on the lowest incomes are ill placed to absorb increased expenditure on food. They are facing increased costs for rent, fuel and other basic costs, and food is usually where people have to cut back to meet pressing expenditure demands.

The availability of food at an affordable price is a necessity not a luxury for the poorest 20% of the population who already face a struggle to feed themselves

properly, to sustain an active and healthy life. Maintaining appropriate food technology, including an adequate range of pesticides, to enable productivity growth on the limited agricultural acreage, is critical to ensure that affordable food is available for all.

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ECPA, the European Crop Protection Association is the pan-European voice of the crop protection industry.