

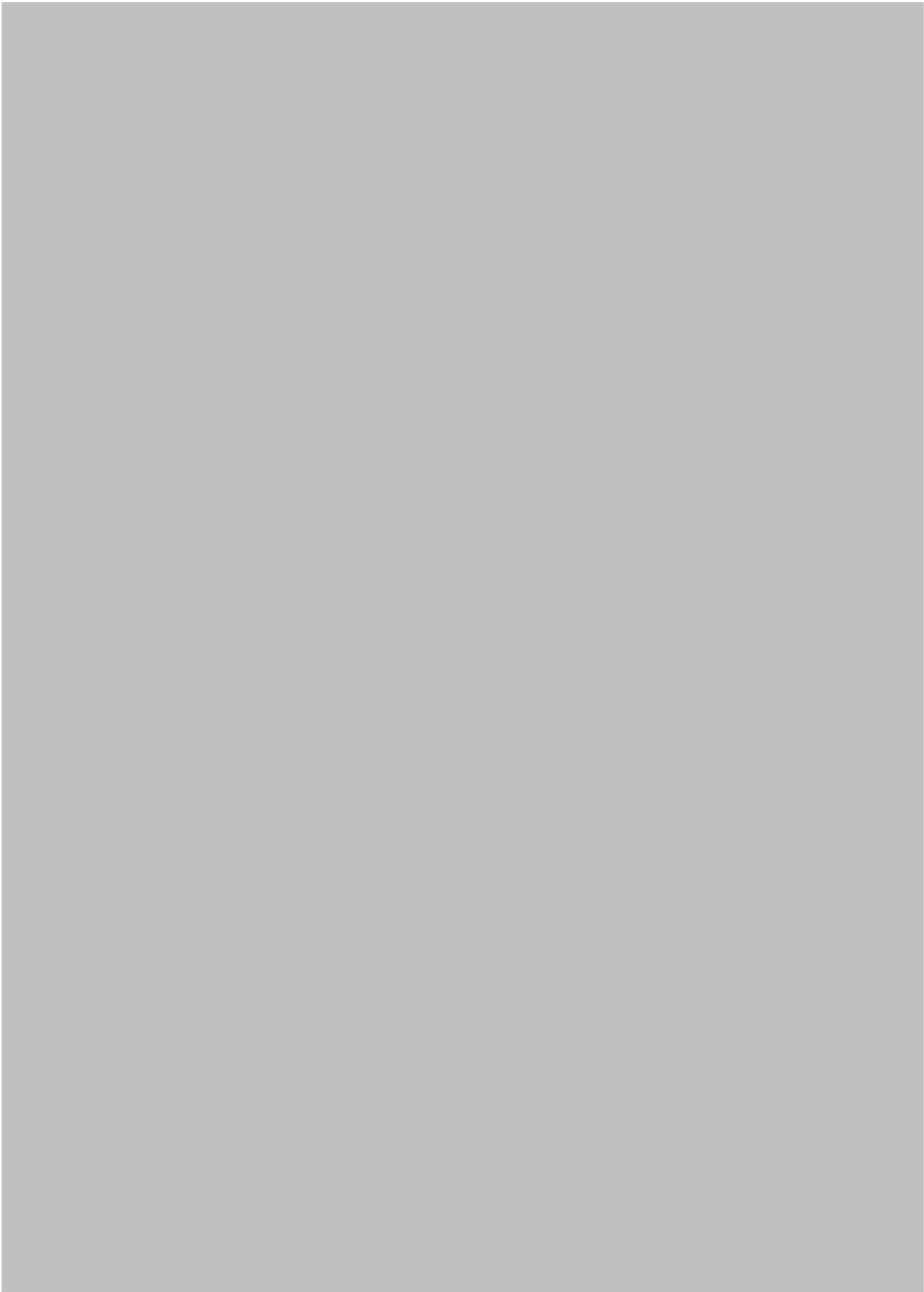


DG ENVIRONMENT

Commissioner Virginijus SINKEVIČIUS
Environment, Oceans and Fisheries

Video-Meeting with German Farmers' Association
9 February 2021, 18.00 – 19.00





Speech

Ladies and gentlemen,

Dear Mr Rukwid

to all of you.

I hope you and your families are doing well and coping with the challenging situation created by the pandemic.

Let me thank you very much for your invitation to join the meeting of your Association Council tonight and to share some thoughts on the European agriculture and environment policy, and on how we can overcome the contradictions that some might see between these two policies.

I hope we can have a constructive and frank exchange on this important topic tonight.

I would certainly have preferred to meet you in person, but as long as the sanitary situation is still fragile, we will all have to continue our exchanges in online format.

But I am sure you agree with me that virtual meetings can never replace personal encounters, so let me say that I look very much forward to coming to Germany as soon as this will be possible, to meet you, and hopefully many of the farmers you represent, face to face and on the ground.

As Commissioner for Environment, Oceans and Fisheries, I count among my main stakeholders and interlocutors not only farmers and foresters, but also fishermen and women. I have managed to use a short window in September, when travelling was possible, to meet with various coastal communities in Brittany and Normandy, mainly to discuss the impact of Brexit. And I can only reconfirm that these

difference. So I look forward to repeating similar experiences

with farmers, in Germany and other Member States. Hopefully very soon.

(Pause)

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We live in challenging times.

And the current crisis is teaching us some clear lessons.

As President von der Leyen said few days ago in Davos: We have to change the way we live and do business. If temperatures keep rising, and nature keeps disappearing, we will see more natural disasters and more zoonotic diseases."

Climate change and biodiversity loss are two sides of the same coin. We are part of nature and we are fully dependent on it, for our own survival, for our physical and mental well-being and for our livelihood.

Nature feeds us human beings and other living creatures, it is the basis for our society, for our economy. Almost half of global GDP some 40 trillion Euros depends on nature.

We owe it respect. But we have already overstepped the boundaries of living in equilibrium with nature and we need to urgently reverse this trend.

I know that farmers, like fishermen or foresters, know this best. They are experiencing it in their daily work.

This is why the European Union put the European Green Deal as a compass towards a more sustainable way of living, working, producing and consuming. This is why the European Union is so committed to put green transition in

the centre of the EU Recovery Plan to support a sustainable, carbon neutral, regenerative economic model.

We need to learn to live within the planetary boundaries. For this we need to inspire and take the global community with us on this journey.

(Pause)

At the same time, the Corona crisis has also demonstrated that behaviour, habits and rules can change. We have seen how the effects can be immediate.

We have also seen the resilience of our food system, which has continued to operate smoothly. This is thanks to huge efforts from all the actors along the chain - farmers, food processors and retailers - to ensure a continuous supply, despite the constraints they face.

Let me be clear: Last spring, it was thanks to collective efforts that it was possible to ensure the supply of food to citizens across the EU, and they deserve all our recognition and appreciation.

The crisis has also changed many
Minister Klöckner recently pointed out, it is not a coincidence that sales of organic products doubled in Germany last year. Many citizens are now more aware of the value of healthy food and a healthy environment, and organic farming is clearly one of the practices contributing to these objectives.

(Pause)

When this Commission took office at the end of 2019, it was very clear that tackling the climate and the environmental crisis were top priorities.

The COVID-19 pandemic made these priorities even more urgent and compelling. It made us step up the gear and be more forceful and determined in putting the green transition in action.

The Strategy for Biodiversity, and the Farm to Fork Strategy, which the Commission adopted last year in May, both contribute to the same goal: putting the EU economy on a more sustainable path, a path that runs inside planetary boundaries.

Since last May, I have met with many representatives of the agriculture sector, or close to the agricultural sector, to discuss these two Strategies: from COPA-COGECA to the Agriculture Committee of the European Parliament and all Agriculture Ministers of the German Länder. I heard their reactions and have taken good note of the main concerns they expressed.

I am therefore grateful for the occasion we have today - let
- to discuss again some of the
main aspects of our two Strategies and to address some of
the key points I know are of concern to you.

I hope that in doing so we can move a bit closer.

(Pause)

Farm to Fork and the **Biodiversity Strategy** both address a generational challenge. I say generational, because I think we shall be judged, probably by our children and grandchildren, how far we will manage to halt and reverse the decline of biodiversity.

That decline, of course, is particularly severe on farmland.

Science tells us that if we fail to tackle this crisis, farmers will be the first ones to suffer. It will mean more soil degradation, more water scarcity, and even fewer pollinators. The crisis

that has been developing for a number of years will steadily deteriorate.

We need a major change.

A transformation of the way we produce food and manage our land.

The Biodiversity Strategy sets the goal to protect 30% of land and 30% of the seas in Europe. The European Union will pursue this objective to be set at the global level this year when negotiations on the new global biodiversity framework will take place in Kunming, China. We trust that our key allies on the international scene will support us on setting the level of ambition high.

The Biodiversity strategy also speaks about protecting at least 10% of agricultural land to preserve its biodiversity. This is urgently needed to provide space for wild animals, plants, pollinators and natural pest regulators. That means, for example, hedges or flower strips, significantly reducing the environmental impacts of the agricultural sector by 2030.

What we are proposing is not really new. The aim is to bring back structural elements that were a typical feature of our agricultural landscape for centuries, but which have disappeared in recent decades.

We want to see a **quarter of all agricultural land under organic farming by 2030**

important to remember that organic farming is a European success story. In Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg, you want to go even further and reach 30% or more!

Demand from the consumer side is growing faster than the cultivation area. We don't want imports to satisfy that demand we want European farmers to benefit. In parallel, we want to increase demand for organic food even further,

Action Plan for organic farming.

We also propose a **50% reduction in sales of antimicrobials** used for farmed animals and aquaculture, and a reduction of nutrient losses by at least 50% to combat eutrophication. This should help ensure that there is no deterioration in soil fertility, and should also help reverse the decline of pollinating insects.

Individually, these targets look very ambitious, but in fact they support each other. When you have more biodiversity, you facilitate biological pest control, which is good for organic farmers. And when you increase the share of organic farming, it makes it easier to achieve the reductions in pesticide use.

Overall, we need a substantial reduction in the environmental footprint of farming, and of overall food production. The benefits will be felt by farmers, but also by society as a whole.

And let me be very clear about one thing: Neither the Biodiversity Strategy nor the Farm to Fork Strategy were meant to blame the agriculture sector, or farmers. I have very well noticed that some have perceived it like this, but I have to forcefully reject this.

The fact that agriculture is one of the main pressures on biodiversity is not something the Commission has invented, but it is a fact, underpinned by several studies and reports, including from the Court of Auditors. And we have to address this fact together, and with a constructive and open approach.

And secondly, speaking about targets, as I know that this was another element of concern: I can only repeat what my colleagues and I have explained on various occasions. The

various targets included in the Biodiversity and the Farm to Fork Strategies do not come out of the blue, but are all based on sound scientific justification, and we are confident that they are achievable and implementable.

But most of all: these two Strategies are policy documents, which propose the direction and outline our political ambition. And the ambition could only be high. But they are not legally binding. It goes without saying that wherever we will follow up with proposals for binding legislation, these will be preceded by proper impact assessments. Evidence-based policy making is and will remain a cornerstone of this work and a key principle of our better regulation agenda.

(pause)

The adoption of the strategies for Biodiversity and Farm to Fork was the first step. Now comes the second and crucial next step: We have to **deliver and implement what we announced in our strategies.**

We have already started implementation, and let me be very clear: implementation happens in close cooperation with stakeholders and Member States and can only succeed if we work together.

The Farm to Fork Strategy includes 27 specific actions, to be delivered between now and 2024. Let me briefly highlight some of them that may be particularly relevant for you:

First of all, we are developing an **EU code and monitoring framework for responsible business and marketing conduct in the food supply chain.** This involves close cooperation with industry associations, and seeking the input of all stakeholders. Our aim is to develop an ambitious but realistic code, which will promote sustainability and equity

through the entire food value chain. This would be good for farmers, and consumers will benefit as well.

We also committed to make an impact beyond Europe and to halt global deforestation and forest degradation. This year we will present a legislative proposal and other measures to **avoid or minimise the placing of products associated with deforestation or forest degradation on the EU market.**

On the international front, the Commission is engaging in the preparations of the **UN Food Systems Summit** scheduled for this autumn. We want to promote a global transition towards sustainable food systems.

This also means putting sustainability in the forefront of EU trade policy.

Regarding the **nature protection target**, the Commission is discussing a **detailed definition with Member States and stakeholders**, as part of our efforts to develop the criteria and guidance that should be agreed by the end of 2021. I want to assure you that the intention is to have a truly inclusive process where Member States, stakeholders and experts have their say. And this is what is currently happening.

Domestically, this will involve a legislative proposal to **establish legally binding restoration targets for nature.** This will make a significant contribution towards helping Europe achieve its biodiversity ambitions.

The proposal, which we plan to adopt in the second half of the year, will focus in particular on ecosystems that have the highest potential to support biodiversity, capture and store carbon and prevent and reduce the impact of natural disasters.

As part of the impact assessment, an online **public consultation on this initiative is already underway, and it runs until 5 April.**

Another key element in the Biodiversity Strategy is the commitment to **plant three billion trees in the EU**. To make sure that this action contributes effectively to biodiversity, we will prepare guidelines on tree planting and afforestation.

The **Common Agricultural Policy** will be a very important contribution to this project. Tree planting should be promoted as a way to contribute to the target on landscape features. I therefore welcome the recent decision of the German Bundestag to promote agroforestry and to make it eligible for CAP funding.

We will also develop **a new Soil Strategy**, to be adopted later this year, with actions to prevent and restore soil degradation in Europe. On this too we would welcome your input **the public consultation is open until the end of April.**

And finally, I cannot emphasise enough the importance of the **Common Agriculture Policy reform** to support farmers in this urgent transition to sustainability. Some 80% of EU funding for biodiversity comes from the Common Agricultural Policy.

The future of agriculture depends on healthy soil ecosystems, on the services that intact ecosystems provide in pollination, and on protecting our crops against pests and climate change.

What we want is to offer a viable future to farmers and rural areas, and the significant budget secured for agriculture in the new Multiannual Financial Framework can make a difference. But for that to happen, the Common Agriculture Policy must effectively change course.

(Pause)

Let me also say a few words about **forests**.

The overall picture is not good. European Forests are in a bad condition. A major report just published by the Commission the State of the Nature Report 2020 shows that **only 22% of EU forest habitats** are in a **favourable condition**.

There are various reasons for this. Forests are strongly affected by climate change, which aggravates other pressures like pests, storms, droughts and fires. There is also the intensification of forest management due to increased demand for biomass. Europe has seen a sharp increase in harvest intensity since 2015, and this has further deteriorated the condition of our forests.

German forests have been particularly affected in recent years, and they are a clear example of vulnerability to these pressures.

So there is a very clear need to act. The Biodiversity Strategy points to the urgent need to increase the quantity of forests, and to improve their health and resilience. To this end, we need to jointly define, map, monitor and strictly
-growth
forests.

But we also want to ensure a thriving EU forestry sector. To make that happen, we will propose a dedicated EU Forest Strategy in the coming months. This strategy will build on the actions and commitments of the Biodiversity Strategy, and it will also be in line with our wider ambitions for climate neutrality, and for a sustainable forest sector.

Our forests are suffering, at the very time we need them most. They are a big part of the solution to the challenges we face in tackling climate and biodiversity crises, and they

have the potential to make a substantial contribution to a sustainable economic recovery.

(Pause)

Ladies and gentlemen,

Farmers are the vital fabric of our society.

They feed us with nutritious and healthy food and we sincerely acknowledge and value their hard and essential work. I know very well that these are hard times for farmers, especially smallholders. They are under pressure, on the one hand, to meet environment and animal welfare standards, and on the other, growing expectations as regards the quality of food.

If we add to those pressures the low prices often paid by retailers, and unpredictable weather events due to climate change, we have the ingredients for a perfect storm. And COVID does not make the life of farmers any easier.

It is with this in mind that we want to support our farmers on the path towards more sustainable farming. This is why, for the next seven years, farmers will continue to receive a substantial share of public money from the EU Budget, under the Common Agricultural Policy.

Farmers are the primary guardians of our land. This is why we need to ensure that the Common Agricultural Policy works for farmers, so that it works for the whole society. Our policies must be geared to accompany farmers in the green transition.

And with all the challenges, different advantages to change. I am convinced that embracing this transition to sustainability is also a huge economic opportunity for farmers.

It will help farmers improve their image and will allow them to make sustainability their trademark. The transition to advantage for our farmers in the medium term.

If we jointly engage fully, and support the Green Deal, the biodiversity targets, and a more sustainable Common Agricultural Policy, we will be able to demonstrate that **farmers are an essential part of the solution.**

(Pause)

Let me finish with a few thoughts on the **reform of the Common Agricultural Policy**, which is key to implement our sustainability agenda.

The Council and the European Parliament have agreed to allocate EUR 387 billion to the new Common Agricultural Policy over the next seven years.

These funds will help farmers rise to the challenges of the Green Deal.

The co-legislators have also agreed that 30% of the overall EU budget including Next Generation EU must contribute towards climate objectives. To reach this objective, 40% of Agricultural expenditure must be dedicated towards these objectives.

The reformed Common Agricultural Policy will be an essential instrument to implement the Biodiversity Strategy in the rural areas. To receive income support, farmers will need to follow environmentally friendly practices and rules. The Agricultural Policy -
reward farmers for good environmental practices.

The agro-environmental measures under rural development will also reward directly farmers that adopt sustainable agricultural practices.

This should help keep farmers at the centre of the transformation, giving them the means and the assistance they need to make the change.

When you look at the package as a whole, the new Common Agricultural Policy has all the ingredients we need to achieve sustainability, and to overcome the contradictions that some might see between environmental and agricultural policies.

That contradiction disappears if you keep your eye on the medium or longer term. **If agriculture is to maintain its current levels of productivity, the only option is mainstreaming sustainable practices.** It is essential to strengthen the ecosystems that farming depends on, and to do all we can to safeguard healthy soils, clean water, biodiversity and pollinators.

(pause)

Under the new Common Agricultural Policy, all Member States, including Germany, will have independence when defining their own **measures at the national level.**

The national CAP strategic plans are a new programming tool to ensure coherent policies. They allow Member States to set national measures and targets, based on local conditions and local needs, while ensuring your contribution to EU objectives and targets.

In December, the Commission sent recommendations to all Member States for the nine specific objectives of the CAP.

Germany to set explicit national values for those targets, while of course taking account of their specific situation.

(pause)

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Commission **presented its Common Agricultural Policy proposals** back in June 2018.

In May last year, the Commission published a report showing how its proposals are compatible with the Green Deal, provided a number of conditions are fulfilled.

The Commission is determined to play its full role in the negotiations, not only as an honest broker between the European Parliament and the Council, but also as a driving force for greater sustainability.

I am convinced that these negotiations can reach a positive conclusion, with a new Agricultural Policy that is very much fit for purpose and ready and able to embrace the necessary transition towards more sustainability.

As you know, the Portuguese Presidency aims to finish the negotiations before the summer. The Commission will lend its full support to those efforts. This timeline ensures that Member States have enough time to prepare for the changes under the new CAP.

(Pause)

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The green transition in agriculture and in all other sectors - will succeed provided all stakeholders work together.

together, and aim for the triple win.

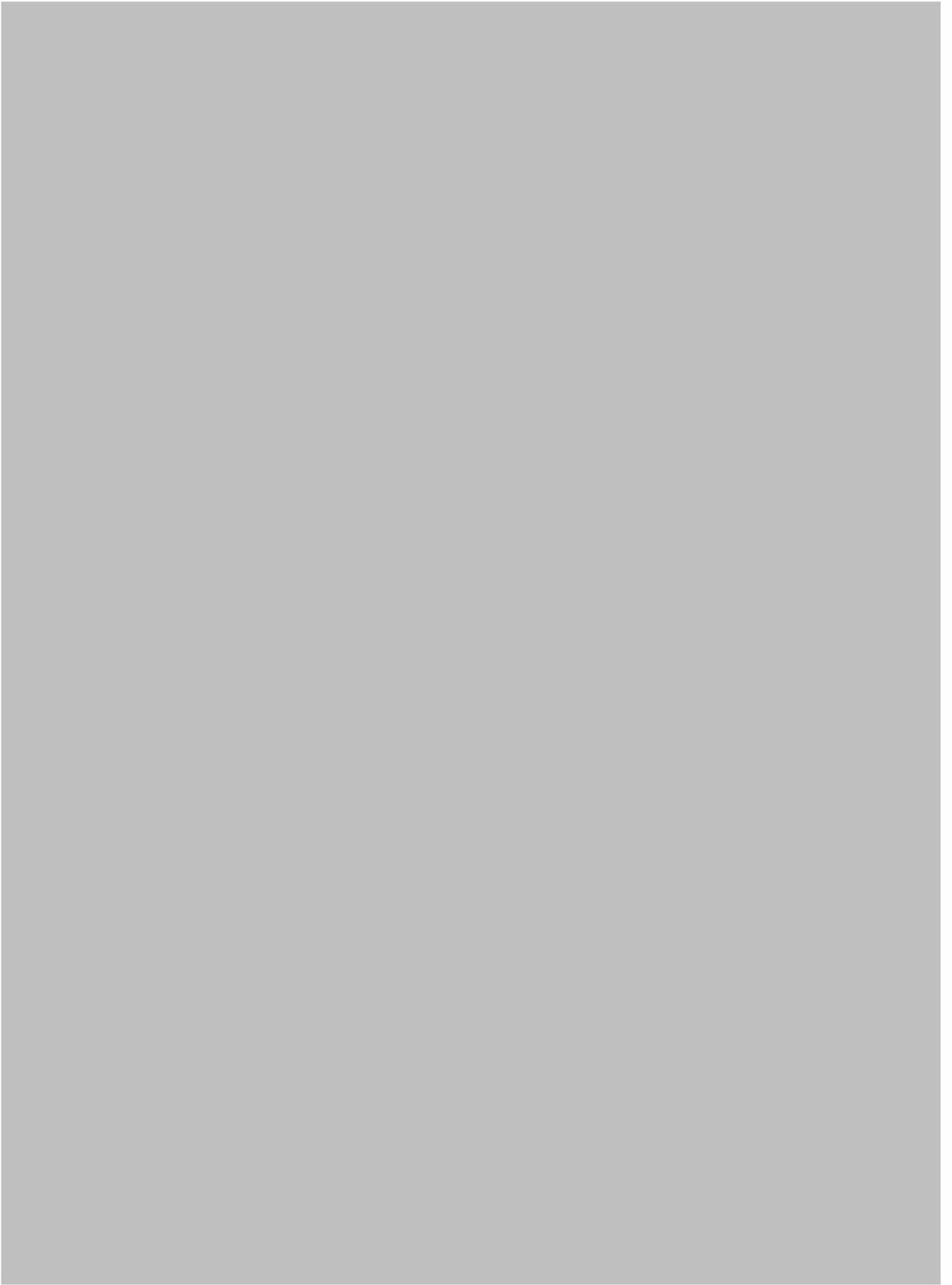
Good for the economy, good for society, and good for the environment we depend on.

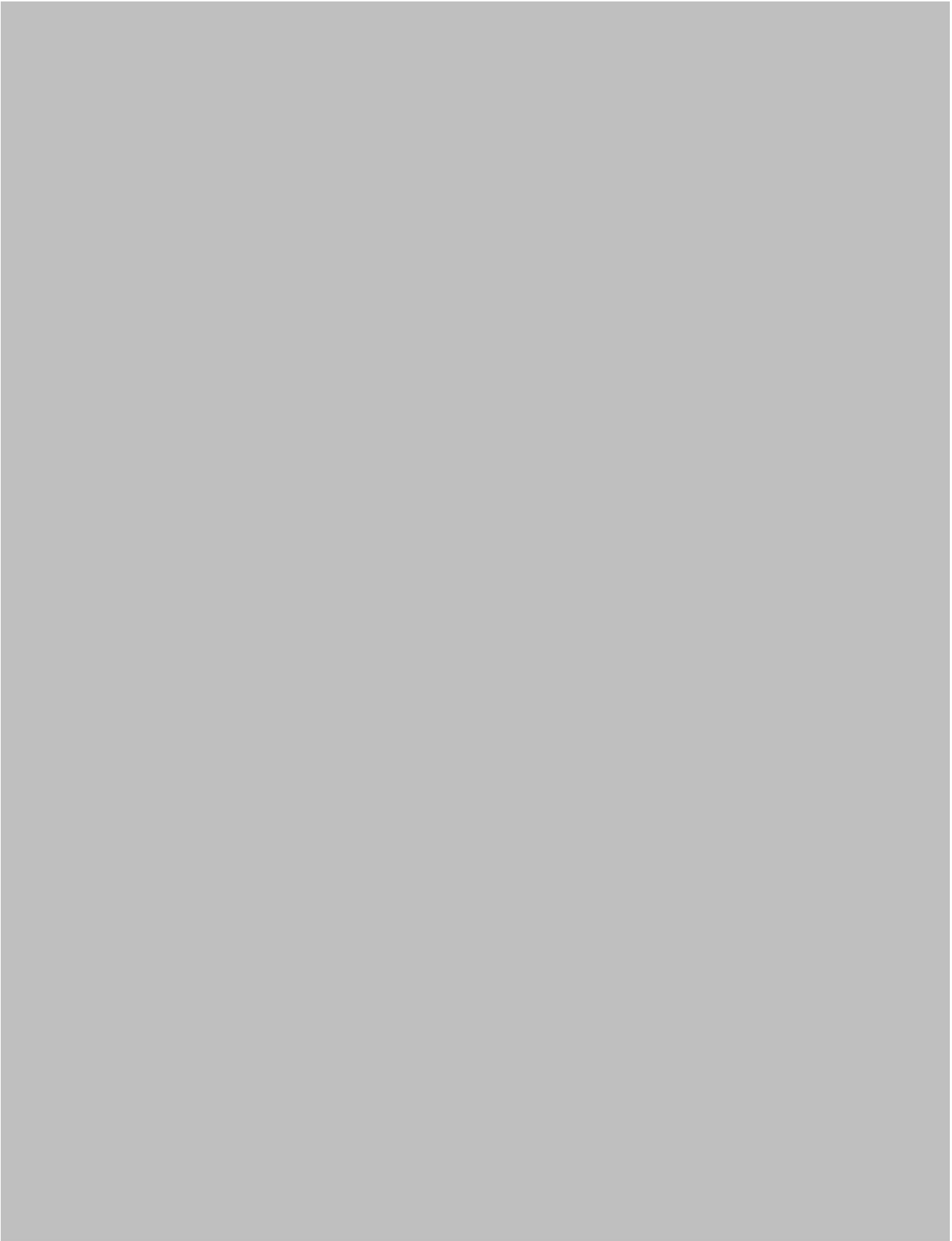
I want farmers to be part of the solution and to be the first ones to benefit from the ongoing transition.

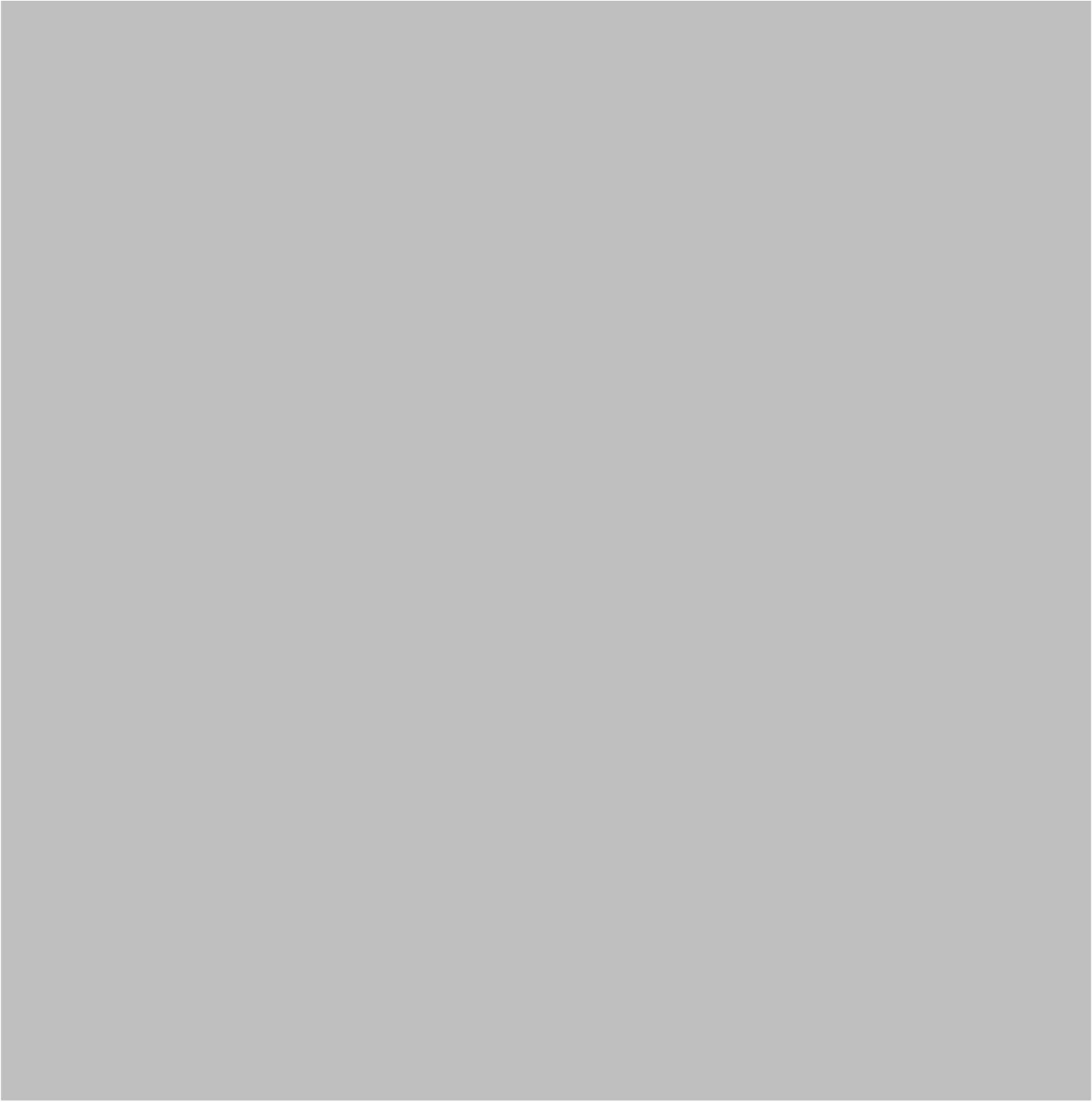
by a
I am convinced that environmental policy and agriculture policy can go hand by hand, and that they need to go hand by hand.

And I am looking forward to contributing to an open and constructive dialogue with farmers, and support their efforts for a more sustainable agriculture.

Thank you for your attention.

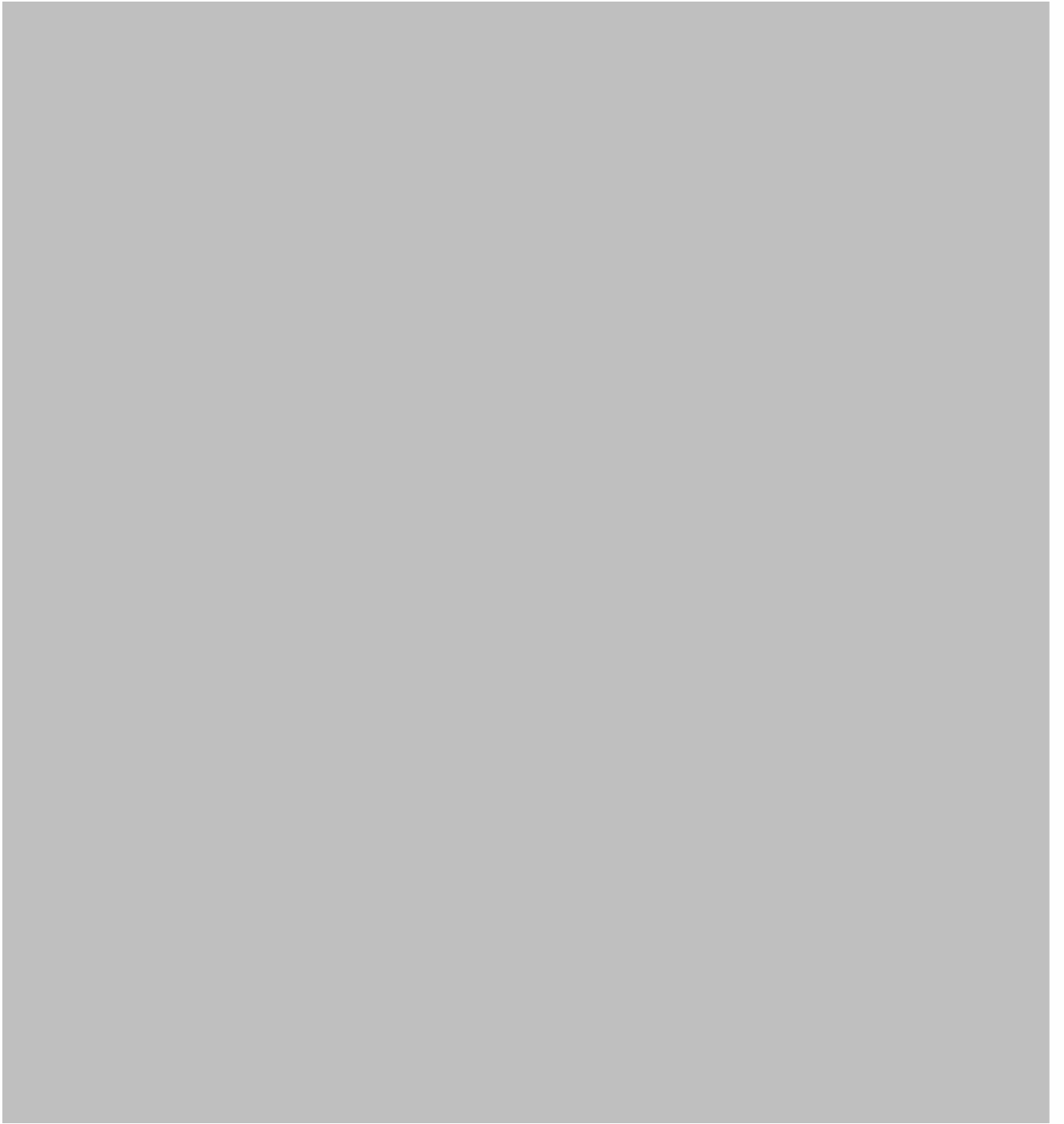




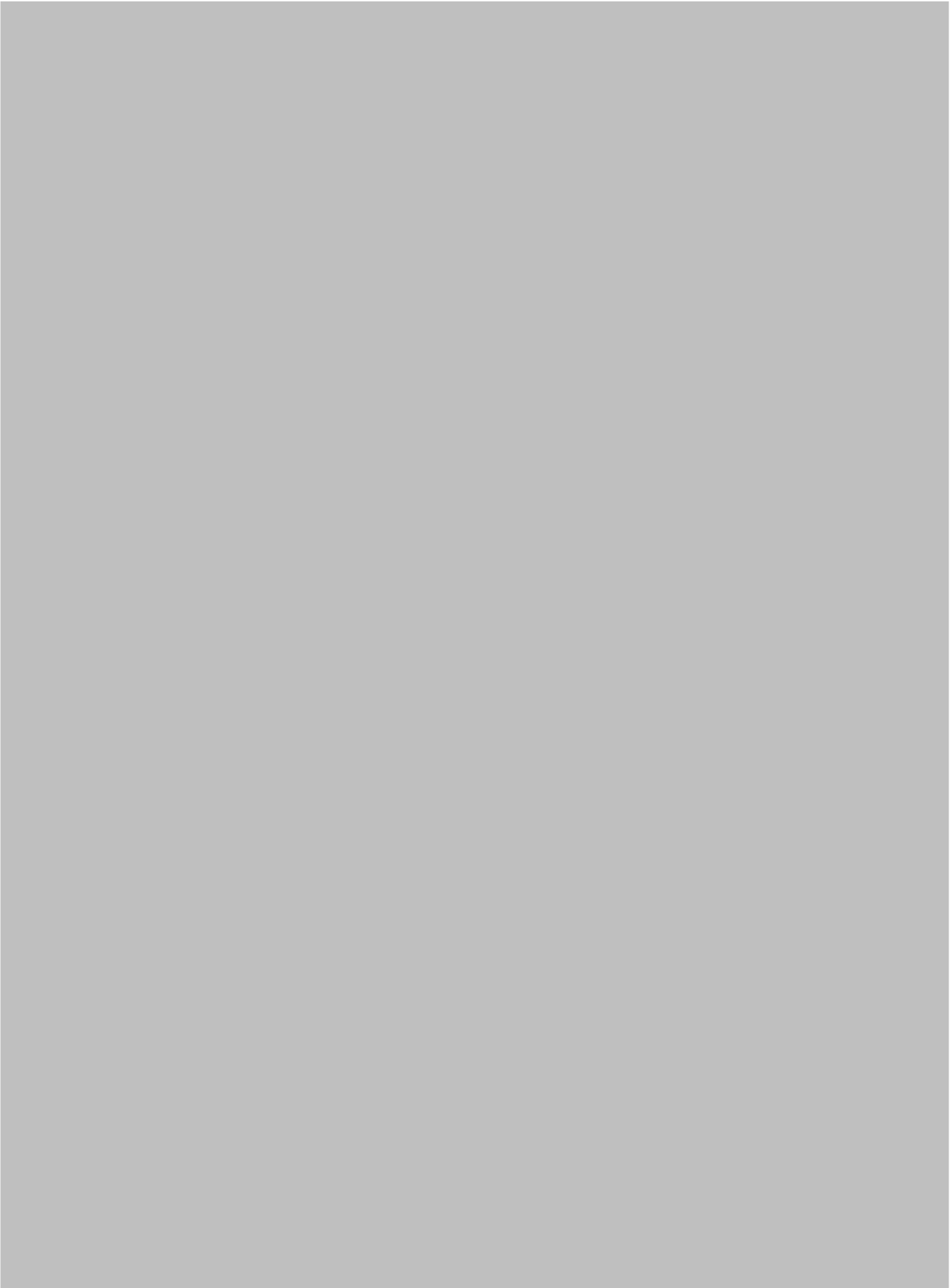


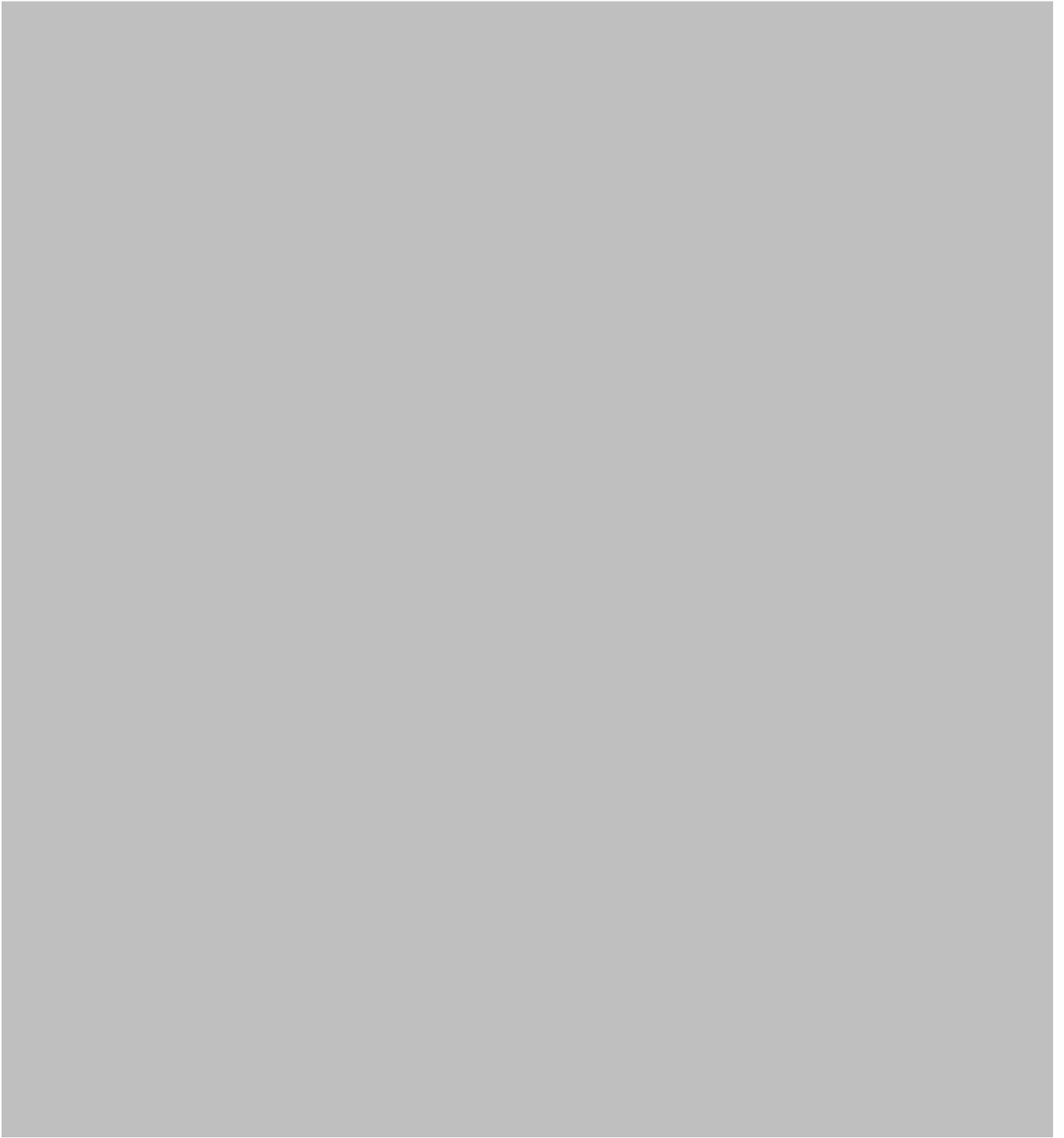


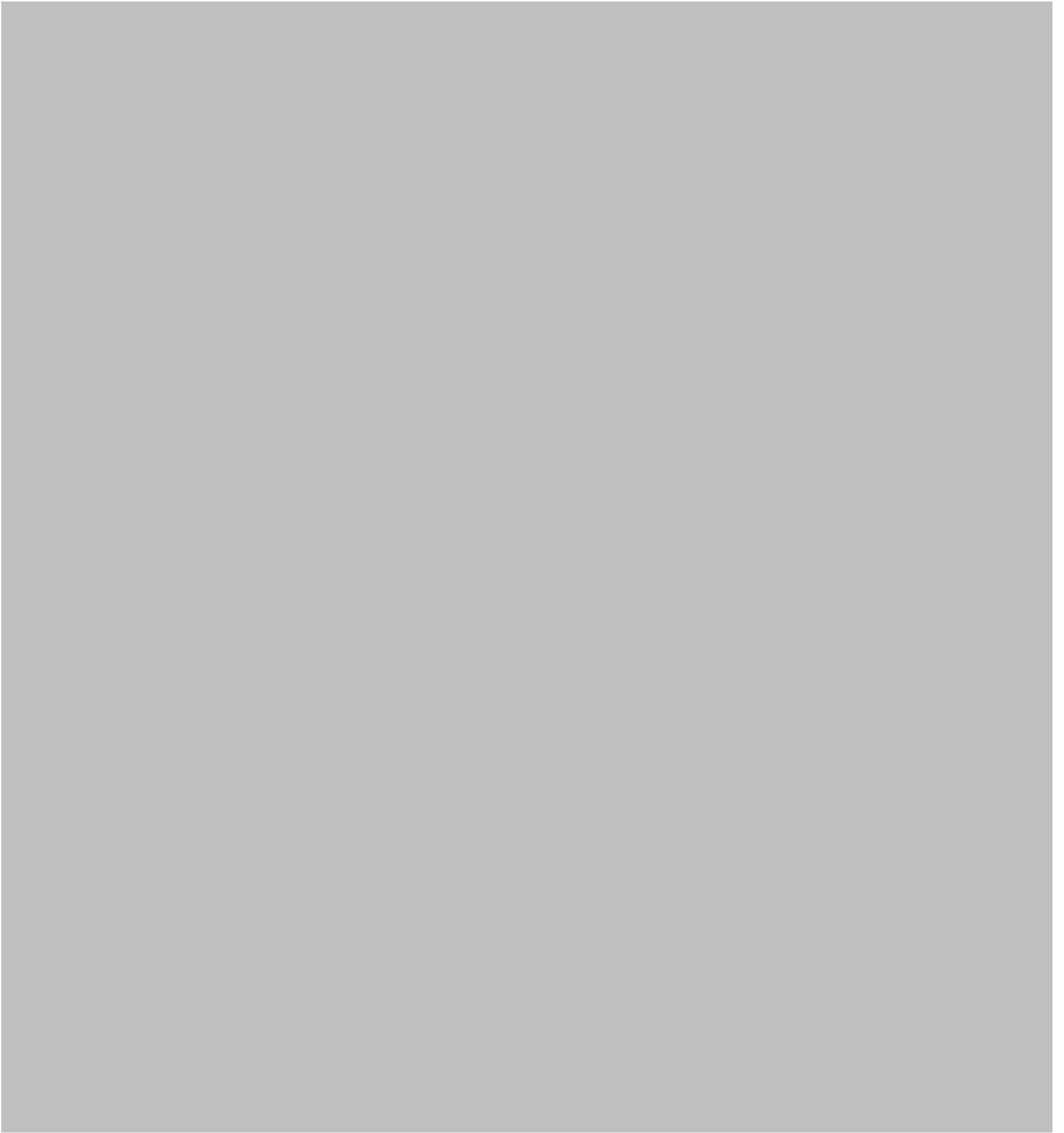








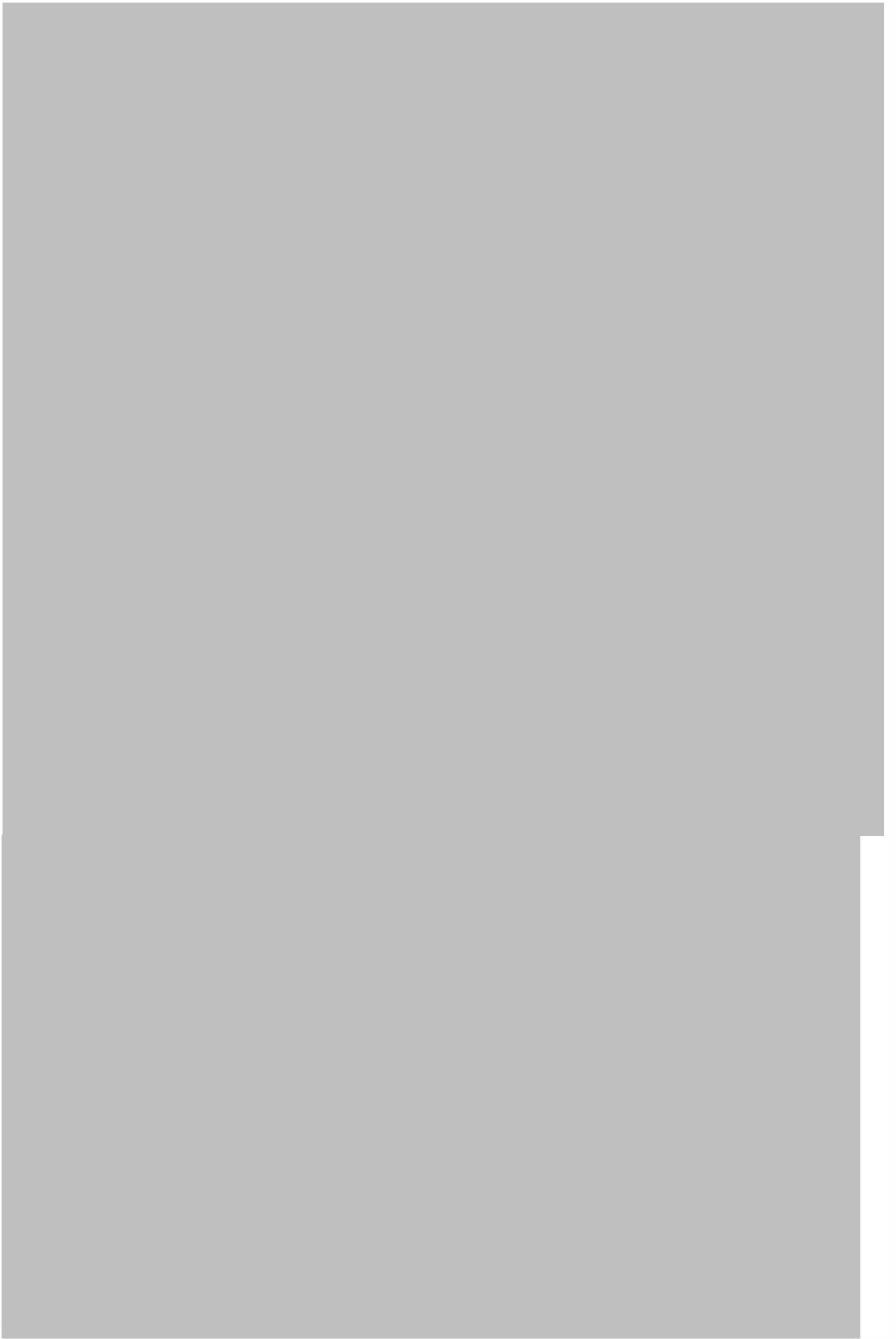




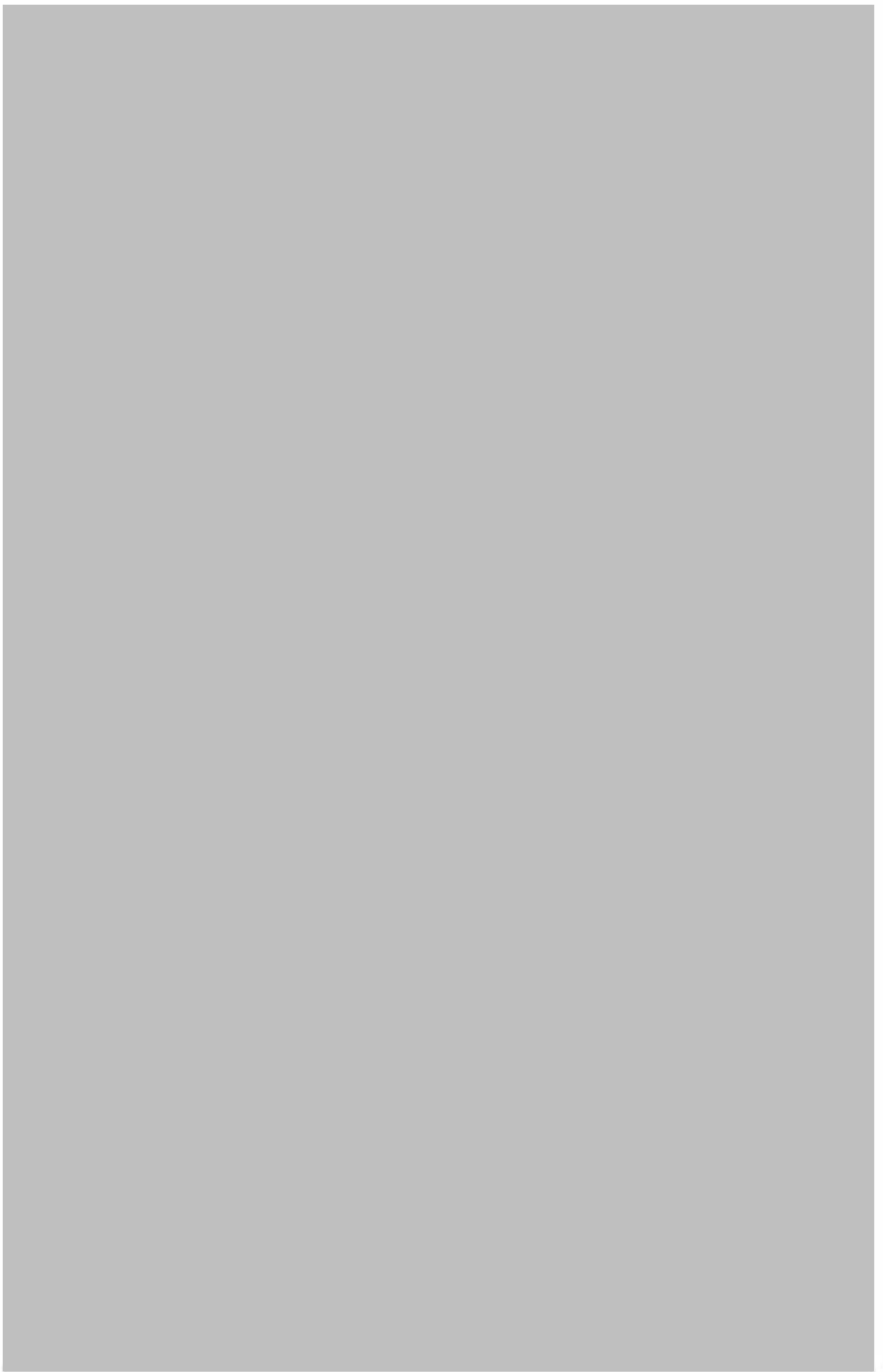


The first part of the paper discusses the importance of understanding the cultural context of the research. It highlights the need for researchers to be sensitive to the values and beliefs of the communities they are studying. This is particularly important in the field of education, where cultural differences can significantly impact learning outcomes. The paper then moves on to discuss the challenges of conducting research in culturally diverse settings. It notes that researchers often face difficulties in establishing rapport with participants and in interpreting their responses. To address these challenges, the paper suggests several strategies, including the use of local researchers and the development of culturally appropriate research instruments. The final part of the paper discusses the importance of ethical considerations in cross-cultural research. It emphasizes the need for researchers to obtain informed consent from participants and to ensure that their research does not cause harm to the communities they are studying.









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