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# CountrySide

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Simplification, responsibility and freedom to act:  
moment for Europe's landowners

Innovators by Nature: be part of the future of  
nature-driven innovations

New report on finding common ground  
in a divided world



FOR FRENCH  
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## Editorial

Chancellor MERZ has underlined the need to “repair” European industry at a time when our competitiveness is slipping against China and the United States.

One hard lesson is becoming clear: regulation alone cannot deliver the transition. The idea that the economy would simply adapt to ever-growing rules, without assessing real-world impacts, is now putting Europe at risk. Regulatory overload, high energy costs, relocation of production, and a shortage of investment capital are already taking a visible toll.

The same urgency applies to European agriculture. For too long, myths and ambitions have been promoted without a serious evaluation of their economic, social and territorial consequences. It is time to return to fundamentals and restore agriculture to its rightful standing—recognising that every family farm is, first and foremost, an entrepreneurial story.

Agriculture is strategic. It must be enabled to innovate, modernise production and set new ambitions, rather than being confined to an idealised vision that won't solve today's challenges.

Nature-inspired innovation offers practical pathways forward. Aligning climate and environmental objectives with competitiveness—and moving away from overly normative or ideological approaches—is not optional; for our members, it is a matter of survival.



**Thierry de l'ESCAILLE**  
ELO Executive President



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# Simplification, responsibility and freedom to act: a moment for Europe's landowners

Across Brussels, the political narrative is shifting. After years of layering new strategies - the European Green Deal, the Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, the Farm to Fork Strategy, the Nature Restoration Regulation - the European institutions are now speaking a new language: *simplification*.

## For Europe's private landowners, this is not a technical footnote. It is a decisive moment

In agriculture, discussions around the future of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) increasingly recognise that excessive reporting requirements, overlapping controls and legal uncertainty are undermining both competitiveness and environmental ambition. Area monitoring systems, pesticide reporting tools, eco-schemes, conditionality rules - each introduced with good intentions - have accumulated into a system that too often prioritises compliance over performance.

In forestry, the implementation of the EU Deforestation Regulation (EUDR), biodiversity targets and carbon accounting frameworks has raised legitimate concerns about proportionality and administrative burden - especially for small and medium-sized forest owners who are already managing sustainably under national frameworks.

In nature conservation, the Nature Restoration Regulation and the 30% protected land target have sparked intense debate. One fact is undeniable: Europe cannot reach its biodiversity objectives without the active engagement of private landowners. Over half of Europe's land is privately managed. No regulation can substitute for the daily stewardship decisions taken on estates, farms and forests.



Dr. Jurgen TACK  
ELO Secretary-General

## This is where simplification becomes essential

Let us be clear: simplification is **not** deregulation. It does not mean abandoning environmental ambition. It means designing rules that are coherent, predictable and workable on the ground. It means reducing duplication between EU and national levels. It means shifting from box-ticking compliance towards measurable outcomes. And above all, it means trusting land managers as partners rather than treating them as suspects.

At ELO, we are advocating for a policy framework that rewards those who *deserve* support - those who invest in biodiversity, soil health, water management and rural employment. We oppose blunt instruments such as arbitrary capping of environmental payments that penalise professional structures and employment-intensive farms. Instead, support should reflect real management efforts and real public goods delivered.

## Simplification must also unlock innovation

Whether through biodiversity credits, carbon markets, precision agriculture or digital monitoring tools, landowners are ready to contribute to Europe's environmental and food security objectives. But innovation requires legal clarity and administrative breathing space.

Friends of the Countryside members are not bystanders in this debate. Through your engagement at national level, your dialogue with Members of the European Parliament, and your participation in initiatives such as the Wildlife Estates Label, you shape the credibility of private stewardship in Brussels.

The coming months - particularly discussions on the next Multiannual Financial Framework and the post-2027 CAP - will determine whether Europe chooses a path of trust-based partnership or continued administrative complexity.

# Innovators by Nature: be part of the future of nature-driven innovations

On 3 December 2025, the European Landowners' Organization and the Friends of the Countryside hosted *Innovators by Nature*, a full-day event, showcasing innovative business models to an audience of landowners, farmers, foresters, entrepreneurs and policymakers from all over Europe.

## How Europe's landowners are shaping a nature-positive economy

The event was a welcome addition to the policy-driven conferences that are the default events in the Brussels EU bubble. Here, the policy framework was present as just that, a framework. But the focus was the reality on the ground. Across eight thematic sessions innovative companies, practitioners, and organisations presented concrete and sustainable solutions, showcasing how landowners and managers can work with nature to support new revenue streams and accelerate sustainable practices.

It was an important demonstration of how policy ambition can translate into real-world applications, showcasing practical tools, projects, and investment pathways already being deployed across Europe's landscapes. For Europe's private landowners, the message is clear: innovation is no longer optional, it is becoming central to long-term resilience, whether economic or environmental, and the event demonstrated that they work hand in hand.

## At a time of climate uncertainty, biodiversity loss, evolving regulations, and shifting markets, the event offered a powerful *counter-narrative*

Rather than being constrained by change, landowners are increasingly engaging with new approaches, exploring nature-based solutions, and evaluating models that combine environmental ambition with economic viability.

The event highlighted how collaboration between innovators and land managers is key to moving from ideas to implementation, combining technological innovation, nature-based approaches, and long-term stewardship to deliver practical outcomes across farms, forests, and estates. Throughout the day, it became obvious that only this partnership can turn rural challenges into opportunities, building resilience while delivering measurable benefits for biodiversity, climate, and communities.



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Anne MARCHADIER  
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Across eight thematic sessions, biodiversity, integrated pest management, forestry, sustainable energy, estate-driven innovation, financing carbon & nature, agroforestry, and regenerative agriculture, a clear message emerged: **Europe's countryside is not waiting for transformation, it is driving it.** Through creativity, collaboration, and long-term stewardship, landowners and innovators together are proving that productive landscapes can also be nature-positive, innovative, and financially robust.

## Biodiversity: a strategic asset

The biodiversity session showed how landowners can move from conservation projects to finance-ready outcomes. CreditNature presented a structured pathway for turning rewilding and restoration into measurable assets. Their approach begins with assessing land condition and management practices, followed by tracking ecological improvement through a science-backed framework. This enables landowners to quantify biodiversity uplift and convert it into verified Nature Credits, directly linking on-the-ground action to investment flows. A detailed case study illustrated how restoring wetlands, introducing natural grazing, and increasing habitat complexity can significantly improve ecosystem scores over time, creating a pipeline of credits that generate income as restoration milestones are achieved. Crucially for estates, capital can be released progressively as delivery is verified, helping fund restoration without requiring large upfront investment.

Syngenta followed with a practical farming perspective, demonstrating how biodiversity can be integrated into productive landscapes at scale. Its Operation Pollinator programme has already supported more than eight million hectares globally through flower margins and habitat strips that boost pollinators, beneficial insects, and farmland birds. Scientific evidence presented during the session showed consistent increases in insect abundance and ecosystem services such as pollination and natural pest control, translating into healthier crops, improved yields, and stronger resilience. Digital tools such as Cropwise Sustainability now allow growers to self-assess biodiversity performance, benchmark results, and plan restoration actions directly from mobile devices. The message for landowners was clear: biodiversity enhancement does not require taking land

out of production. Targeted interventions at field margins and landscape scale can deliver measurable gains while supporting farm profitability.

Carmeuse brought a striking example from extractive landscapes, showing how active quarries can be managed dynamically to create temporary and permanent habitats supporting pioneer species such as sand martins, natterjack toads, and eagle owls. Through its *Life in Quarries* approach, restoration is integrated directly into operations using ponds, cliffs, hedgerows, and wetlands. Perhaps most relevant for rural estates were the lessons learned that effective biodiversity outcomes do not always require costly investments, but they do depend on long-term commitment, expert partnerships, pragmatic monitoring, and strong stakeholder communication.

The session concluded with RISE Foundation's presentation on developing a high-integrity Nature Credit pathway tailored to private land conservation. Their model focuses on clear baselines, measurable ecological uplift, scalable monitoring, and strong governance, enabling landowners to monetise verified biodiversity improvements while gaining formal recognition for stewardship.

Across all presentations, shared themes emerged: measurement matters, restoration can pay, working landscapes count, and finance is coming, but alignment between projects and policy is still needed. Biodiversity is no longer just an environmental responsibility. With the right tools and frameworks, it is becoming a strategic opportunity for rural estates.

### **Integrated Pest Management: restoring balance while protecting productivity**

The Integrated Pest Management (IPM) session demonstrated how nature-based crop protection is moving from niche practice to mainstream strategy, with or without the use of conventional products. IBMA presented IPM as an ecosystem-based system built around prevention, monitoring, biological control, resistant varieties, and precision intervention. Evidence showed that IPM can deliver both short-term agronomic benefits and long-term resilience, yet adoption across Europe remains far below what science supports. International examples illustrated what becomes possible when innovation and policy align: in Brazil, biological control is now used on roughly 60% of agricultural land.

Field trials by FytoFend from grapes and potato systems showed that plant defence activators and biological solutions can achieve high efficacy while reducing chemical inputs. In some cases, growers reported reduced residues, lower environmental impact, and increased profitability.

Sumitomo Chemical added a regenerative perspective, showing how biological solutions are helping landowners link IPM with soil health. By combining practices such as cover crops and reduced tillage with microbial tools like mycorrhizae and natural pest-control organisms, they demonstrated how farms can improve nutrient efficiency, reduce chemical inputs, and build resilience, highlighting the growing convergence between regenerative agriculture and IPM.



Dr. Jurgen TACK, ELO Secretary-General



Delphine DUPEUX, Director of EU Biodiversity Policy and Parliamentary Affairs, ELO

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For landowners, the message was practical and empowering: IPM is not a single product but a system, one that strengthens farm resilience, aligns with evolving regulation, and supports biodiversity while maintaining yields, and often reducing input costs.

### Forestry: building resilient forests and investable landscapes

Forests deliver immense environmental value, from carbon storage to biodiversity, and from water regulation to soil stability, and risk buffering. Yet much of this remains invisible to markets. The forestry session focused on how unified metrics could unlock new revenue streams while reducing administrative burden.

The Future Forest Initiative highlighted the need for unified nature metrics that allow forest owners to access emerging biodiversity, carbon markets and improve resilience. Their presentation stressed a stark reality: without healthy forests, everything built on top of them becomes unproductive, unstable, and increasingly uninsurable. To address this, they proposed a shared “Nature Intelligence Infrastructure” for Europe’s forests, a common measurement backbone that would enable landowners to measure once and report everywhere. Such a framework would turn forest condition data in trusted assets, usable across biodiversity credits, water markets, risk models, and outcome-based management contracts.

Land Life brought a ground-level perspective, showcasing large-scale restoration across the Iberian Peninsula, where more than five million native trees have been planted since 2018. Using

precision planting, remote sensing, AI-supported monitoring, and autonomous seeding systems, projects are designed around native species and local conditions to ensure long-term resilience to drought, heatwaves, and fire. Innovative finance models were also presented, allowing corporate funders to support restoration upfront in exchange for future environmental outcomes such as carbon credits, while landowners retain stewardship and long-term benefits.

Forests emerged not just as ecological infrastructure, but as emerging economic infrastructure.

### Sustainable energy: producing food and power on the same land

The sustainable energy session explored how rural landscapes can contribute to decarbonisation, while contributing to the financial resilience for the rural entrepreneur.

Corteva Agriscience presented a model for producing sustainable fuel using short-season sunflower as an intermediate crop between winter cereals, effectively enabling three crops in two years. Beyond generating additional income, the system improves soil structure, organic matter, and biodiversity.

Nufarm presented *carinata* as a sustainable intermediate oilseed crop that can be grown between main food crops to produce certified feedstock for fuel. As a non-food, deep-rooted crop, *carinata* improves soil structure, supports biodiversity, enhances nutrient efficiency, and contributes to soil carbon sequestration, while generating additional farm income.

ILOS then illustrated how solar installations can coexist with agriculture through elevated or vertical panels that preserve machinery access, reduce soil overheating, improve water efficiency, and in many cases enhance crop performance under stress. Advanced systems integrate AI-guided machinery, autonomous robots, and precision irrigation.

For landowners, agrivoltaics offers stable energy income alongside continued food production. The conclusion resonated strongly: renewable energy is not about replacing agriculture, it is about strengthening it and complementing in.

### **Estate-driven innovation: digital tools, biodiversity labels, and estate diversification**

The estate-driven innovation session focused on how landowners can modernise operations, strengthen biodiversity credentials, and create new revenue streams, all while preserving landscape integrity. Rather than presenting abstract concepts, speakers shared concrete tools already being deployed across European estates.

Natlink showed how digital platforms are helping estates modernise wildlife and land management, combining GPS tracking, trail cameras, and mobile apps to provide real-time oversight of game populations, safety, predators, and disease. By centralising field data into shared dashboards, landowners can improve coordination, speed up responses to challenges such as swine fever, and demonstrate responsible stewardship, highlighting digitalisation as essential in today's estate management practices.

The Wildlife Estates (WE) Label showcased how biodiversity stewardship can be formally recognised and turned into economic advantage. Coordinated by ELO, the science-based certification scheme assesses habitat conservation, restoration efforts, and sustainable land management across more than two million hectares in 19 countries. Beyond recognition, the label builds investor trust, supports ESG reporting, and opens access to biodiversity finance, helping estates translate good management into measurable natural capital.

Wild Connection presented low-impact tourism as a diversification pathway for estates, offering nature-based experiences such as outdoor activities, local gastronomy, and light glamping that generate income without permanent infrastructure. By focusing on temporary installations and authorised paths, the model allows landowners to create value through cultural and natural heritage while preserving biodiversity and landscape integrity.

### **Financing nature: bringing ecosystems onto the balance sheet**

The financing session marked a turning point, showing how biodiversity, soil, water, and forests are increasingly being treated as financial assets. The Landbanking Group presented its Natural Capital Management System, a digital platform that allows landowners to measure ecosystem performance, monitor land condition, and convert verified improvements into investable outcomes. Through tools such as the Ecosystem Integrity Index,

ecological data is translated into financial value, enabling new mechanisms including outcome-linked loans, landscape transition funds, and verified nature units tied to forests, agroforestry, cropland regeneration, and conservation areas. For landowners, this creates a direct pathway from stewardship to revenue: restoration efforts can attract upfront private capital while long-term ownership remains unchanged. Perhaps most significantly, the session highlighted a shifting role for rural land managers. Rather than passive recipients of subsidies, landowners are becoming suppliers of ecosystem services to companies and investors seeking resilience against climate and biodiversity risks. By providing verified environmental data, estates gain access to new funding streams and position themselves at the centre of an emerging NatureFinTech economy, where nature-positive management becomes both a strategic and financial asset.

### **Agroforestry: measuring biodiversity gains and turning trees into natural capital**

The agroforestry session presented the DigitAF Horizon Europe project, highlighting how integrating trees into farmland delivers measurable biodiversity, climate, productivity benefits and how new digital tools are making these gains verifiable and market-ready. Moving beyond advocacy, DigitAF focuses on proving impact, with practical calculators enabling landowners to quantify biodiversity gains, carbon sequestration, and soil health improvements at plot level. Officially recognised under the EU's CAP, agroforestry is increasingly positioned as both an agronomic and financial strategy, with verified outcomes opening access to future nature credits and outcome-based payments. For landowners, the message was clear: trees on farms are becoming measurable natural capital assets in Europe's emerging nature-positive economy.

### **Regenerative agriculture: making soil health measurable, resilient, and profitable**

The regenerative agriculture session demonstrated how soil is becoming a measurable and investable asset, as regenerative practices converge with digital monitoring and outcome-based markets. BASF Agricultural Solutions showed how innovation across crop protection, seeds, biosolutions, and digital platforms such as Xarvio can help farmers reduce disease and greenhouse gas intensity while maintaining, and in some cases increasing, yields. BASF emphasised that resilient farming systems depend on a diverse toolbox combining conventional and biological solutions, advanced genetics, and precision decision-support, warning that regenerative agriculture must be enabled by innovation rather than constrained by regulation.

Downforce Technologies presented satellite-based monitoring systems that allow landowners to track soil organic carbon with high precision across entire properties. Using empirical modelling and ISO-aligned verification, Downforce enables estates to generate certified soil carbon reports, opening access to carbon markets, ESG reporting, and climate finance. Importantly, these insights also deliver immediate agronomic benefits, including improved water retention, reduced erosion, healthier soil biolo-

gy, and greater resilience to drought and extreme weather, reinforcing soil data as a growing component of land value.

Completing the picture, Indigo connected regenerative practices directly to market mechanisms. By combining core practices such as cover crops, reduced tillage, crop rotation, and livestock integration with microbial seed treatments and digital monitoring, Indigo enables farmers to generate soil-based carbon credits and sustainability claims, sold to companies seeking verified environmental outcomes. Indigo shared global results showing millions paid directly to growers, alongside large-scale greenhouse gas reductions and water savings.

Together, the session showed that regenerative agriculture is evolving from a set of practices into a performance-based system, where verified soil improvement unlocks multiple value streams, from higher productivity to climate finance, positioning landowners who adopt early at the forefront of Europe's emerging nature-positive economy.

### The countryside at the heart of change

Throughout the day, Innovators by Nature stressed that alignment between policy ambition and practical delivery, environmental goals and economic realities, innovation and long-term stewardship is possible. But we need to support the adoption of these approaches so we can deliver the green transition and mitigate climate change without jeopardising rural livelihoods. Across biodiversity metrics, biological crop protection, forest monitoring, agroforestry tools, renewable energy systems, estate management platforms, and natural capital finance, a coherent picture emerged: **Europe's rural landscapes are becoming measurable, investable, and resilient, while remaining fundamentally productive.**

Climate change, regulatory simplification, and market expectations are reshaping agriculture and forestry at unprecedented speed. Yet the event made clear that landowners are not passive recipients of this transition, they are active partners in delivering Europe's Green Deal objectives, biodiversity targets, and climate commitments. On farms, in forests, and across estates, land managers are already implementing solutions that restore ecosystems, strengthen food security, generate renewable energy, and attract private investment into nature.



Peter MOSS, Downforce Technologies CEO

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The innovators presenting at the conference demonstrated that the tools now exist to move from aspiration to action, and that many of these solutions are already being deployed. Science-based metrics are making biodiversity visible. Regenerative practices and biological solutions are reducing environmental footprints while sustaining yields. Digital platforms are improving transparency and accountability. Emerging finance models are connecting stewardship directly to capital markets. Together, these innovations provide a practical pathway for aligning the CAP, climate policies, and biodiversity strategy with on-the-ground delivery.

The message to policymakers was equally clear: Europe's landowners are ready to lead, but they need coherent frameworks, enabling regulation, and investment conditions that reward outcomes rather than constrain innovation. With the right signals, rural landscapes can become powerful engines of climate mitigation, biodiversity recovery, and economic resilience.

Hectare by hectare, forest by forest, field by field, innovators and landowners are shaping a countryside that delivers food, fibre, energy, biodiversity, and climate resilience, while sustaining rural livelihoods and communities. The nature-positive economy is no longer a distant vision, it is taking shape across Europe's landscapes, built through collaboration between land managers, innovators, investors, and policymakers, and grounded in the knowledge of those who work the land every day.

#### ORGANISERS



#### KEYNOTE PARTNERS



#### SESSION PARTNERS



# Unlocking the true value of soil – Your primary asset



Soil is the living, breathing foundation of every agricultural operation and landscape investment - a complex microbiome that must be nurtured to sustain productivity, sustainable farming systems and long-term value.

One of the most powerful indicators of soil health is Soil Organic Matter (SOM). Building SOM delivers stronger yields, improved resilience to climate shocks, increased land value and credible sustainability claims. Yet historically, soil has been difficult to measure at scale.

## Scalable soil measurements

Thanks to new data modelling techniques, it is now possible to gain a detailed picture of SOM by measuring Soil Organic Carbon (SOC) across very large areas. By building on traditional soil sampling, carbon sequestration can be measured and monitored across your whole property or an entire region at 10m resolution, every 10 days, from 2017 to the present. This offers insights into how the soil has responded to land management activities over the years and highlights areas for improvement.

Downforce Technologies delivers SOC data that is accurate, scalable and affordable. By using ground-based data such as soil type, land use, typography and climate, our approach builds a contextually rich picture of the property to create a digital twin. Combined with consistent satellite observations, this forms an empirical model that captures both farm- and field-level variability driven by weather and management. Aligning with global standards and validated by 3rd party assessors to satisfy requirements around uncertainty, primary data, calibrated modelling and statistically significant sampling, Downforce have assessed SOC across more than 60 million hectares in 22 countries.

## Why SOC data matters for farmers and landowners

The value of accurate, scalable and affordable SOC measurements is immense. It offers:

- **Data-driven farming:** Nine years of continuous data reveals “what worked where,” empowering smarter crop rotations and strategic management
- **Sustainability evidence:** Gain credible proof of carbon removals and outcomes from regenerative practices for supply chain value, green finance options or carbon markets
- **Long-term profitability:** Healthier soils drive stronger yields and farm resilience over the long term
- **Land value increase:** As the base asset of any farming operation, robust evidence of soil health can drive higher valuations and market returns

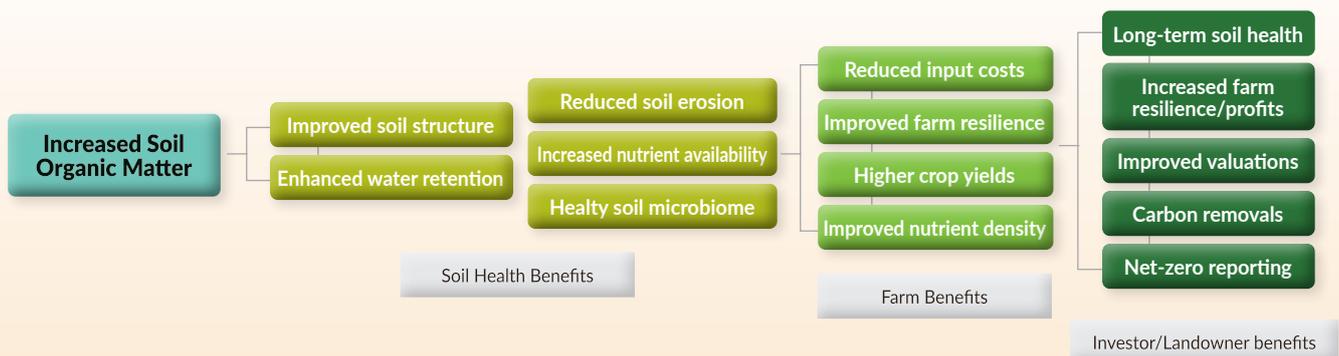
## Soil data in practice

Jordans Cereals – an iconic UK producer of granola and cereal bars – works with their grain suppliers through the Jordans Farm Partnership to support land management that benefits the soil, biodiversity and the farms’ resilience. In partnering with Downforce, the farms’ SOC stocks and variability were assessed back to 2017, providing rich insights into how soil across the farm had responded to rotations, tillage, cover crops, etc. over time. Not only could the farmers see how much carbon had been stored from past management, they could make data-driven strategic decisions for future interventions to maximise efficiency, increase profitability and build natural capital within their operations. Together, let’s accelerate sustainable land management and make healthy soils the foundation of thriving landscapes.



[View the full Jordans case study here.](#)

To explore how soil insights can unlock value for your business, contact our team: [info@downforce.tech](mailto:info@downforce.tech)





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# Guard or gardener? Rethinking nature stewardship or protection



Pile LIGI

Chairman of the Management Board,  
„Landowners' Nature Fund“

Have you ever considered the difference between nature stewardship and nature protection? For most, they are synonyms describing the same thing – a caring attitude towards our environment. However, behind these two concepts lie two different philosophies and relationships with nature. This difference was pointed out decades ago by one of Estonia's greatest thinkers, Uku MASING, who distinguished between two contrasting roles: that of the guard and that of the gardener.

For MASING, **nature protection** (*looduskaitse*) is the role of the guard. It stems from the word “to protect” and presupposes a threat against which nature, as an external object, must be defended with restrictions and prohibitions. This approach sets man and nature as adversaries, where one regulates the actions of the other. **Nature stewardship** (*loodushoid*), however, is the role of the gardener. It comes from the word “to hold” or “to care for,” signifying active care, understanding, and coexistence. A gardener does not stand outside the garden but acts within it, knowing that by keeping the garden, they are also keeping themselves.

**As the Estonian polyhistor Uku MASING said:  
“Nature Protection is defending against someone, while  
Nature Stewardship is preserving for something.”**

This philosophy is not mere theory but a practical model. Strong and lasting nature stewardship takes social psychology into ac-



count – how people feel about the choices they make. Prohibitions and coercion create conflict and resistance. “Nudging,” however, as practiced by the **landowners conservation co-operation**, The Nature Fund (*Loodushoiu Fond*), invites people to think and choose for themselves.

At the heart of their work is overcoming the “conservation vs. landowner” antagonism. When landowners feel they are not being pushed into a corner but are being listened to, change emerges that is their own and therefore lasting. They did not wait for someone to ban something; they reached agreements themselves. The success of this approach is evident in the results of an Environmental Investment Centre - supported nature protection project led by landowners: 100,000 hectares of land under hunting agreements using lead-free ammunition.

Such collaboration highlighted a new need: being a good gardener also requires knowledge. Building on this success, a comprehensive course and materials on ecological restoration have been developed with the support of the **Erasmus+ WESEM** project. These materials are designed for vocational schools and advisory centers seeking to enhance landowners' knowledge. They offer training in a field where more expertise is needed to become better stewards of the land. They align with the idea of stewardship rather than locking land away from landowners' use.

Ultimately, words and actions have power. Do we create a system based on force and confrontation, placing the landowner in the role of a prisoner monitored by a guard? Or one based on trust and free will, where the landowner is the gardener of their own land? Lasting nature stewardship cannot be created by command – it must grow from free choice and the understanding that by caring for nature, we are caring for ourselves.

**More information about the material created by landowners  
for landowners: [wesem-erasmus.eu](https://wesem-erasmus.eu)**

# Peatlands: A farming issue, not just an environmental one



Lodovica VON FREYBERG  
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Peatlands are widely recognised for their environmental value, but for European farmers and landowners they remain a complex and demanding land management challenge. Although the conservation of peatlands plays a role in climate mitigation, too often the costs of this ecosystem is left alone on the shoulders of the landowners and managers. Projects such as “EUKI” address these difficulties by establishing long-term European alliance of national governments and a variety of stakeholders for sustainable resource management.

## The reality on the ground

Farmers are essential to peatland protection, yet their participation in peatland strategies has often been limited. The EUKI project organized workshops with farmers and land managers which show that the main barriers to change are not resistance, but uncertainty and risk. Rewetting peatlands raises practical concerns about water level management, potential flooding, invasive species, and compatibility with existing farming systems.

Many farmers also lack access to training, advisory services, and examples of viable wetland-based practices such as paludiculture. In addition, rapidly changing policy frameworks and limited recognition of farmers' environmental contributions can undermine motivation and long-term planning security.

## The financial challenge and new income opportunities

Economics remains one of the biggest hurdles. Existing subsidy systems often continue to favour drainage-based agriculture, while markets for paludiculture products are still underdeveloped. Farmers face high upfront investment costs and limited financial support for training, machinery adapted to wet soils, and land improvements.

Because farming alone may not always deliver sufficient short-term income on rewetted peatlands, alternative business models are gaining attention. Rewetted peatlands deliver valuable ecosystem services, including carbon emission reductions, water purification, flood control, and biodiversity enhancement. These services are gaining recognition as public goods that require long-term financial support.

One growing sector is that of peatland carbon credits, which are generated through rewetting and focus on avoided emissions rather than carbon sequestration. These credits are already traded on a voluntary basis, driven mainly by corporate climate commitments. At EU level, the CRCF<sup>1</sup> aims to improve the credibility, transparency, and comparability of such schemes, potentially strengthening their role in farm-level income diversification.

Beyond carbon, there is also growing attention on nature credits. Interest has especially increased since the European Commission published its Roadmap<sup>2</sup> on mechanisms that reward nature restoration alongside sustainable land management. This momentum is reflected in several EU-funded pilot projects currently testing compensation. ELO is involved in one of these initiatives through the LIFE project Biodiversity CrEW (Credits for European Wetlands), which is developing and testing standards for generating biodiversity credits in wetland ecosystems, including peatlands.

## The way forward

Farmers consistently call for long-term rules, fair compensation, and practical support. Financial incentives for sustainable peatland management must equal or exceed those for drainage-based practices. Access to local advisors, adapted machinery, and market connections is essential, as is involving farmers directly in policymaking.

Every peatland is unique. With cooperation, knowledge exchange, and reliable financing, peatlands can remain productive landscapes which support farm incomes while delivering long-term benefits for climate, water, and biodiversity.

1 *Carbon Farming and Carbon Removal: REGULATION (EU) 2024/3012 Of the Parliament and of the Council – Establishing a Union Certification Framework for Permanent Carbon Removals, Carbon Farming and Carbon Storage in Products*

2 *Roadmap towards Nature Credits: Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions.*





# ILOS

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# PathFinder workshops: co-creating the future of European forest policy with local stakeholders



Pierre LE MAÎTRE  
EU Project and Policy Officer, ELO

As part of the EU PathFinder project, ELO and the University of Freiburg organised five regional workshops in Madrid, Vienna, Helsinki, Ljubljana, and Brussels to gather stakeholder perspectives on EU forest policy. Across the five workshops, 57 participants representing 38 organisations contributed to discussions on forest governance, future challenges and the policy actions required to support resilient and multifunctional European forests.

In Spain, participants broadly agreed on several widely supported stepping stones, including strengthening education and awareness, increasing regional management capacity, investing in research and innovation, improving governance coordination across regions, and establishing long-term monitoring systems to track resilience, biodiversity and fire risk. Participants also highlighted the importance of maintaining active, multifunctional forest management to balance ecological, economic and social objectives. However, several proposals were contested, including concerns over funding, eligibility, fairness, and potential complexity payments for ecosystem services schemes, “close-to-nature” forest management approaches considered less suited to dry ecosystems, opposed large-scale protection of unmanaged old-growth forest, and cross-regional management strategies which affect regional autonomy.

In Helsinki, participants identified integrating multifunctional forest education into school curricula as a central priority, alongside updating forest management practices through new technologies and developing a national 2030 Multifunctionality Plan to guide adaptive governance. While improving forest by-product value chains was seen as beneficial, some questioned its feasibility, and proposals such as land-use anti-pollution zoning generated debate over implementation responsibilities and governance challenges.

The Austrian workshop focused on governance structures and institutional clarity. Participants supported the development of a comprehensive system for tracking forest conditions, the creation of a transparent national forest budget, adaptive national forest management guidance tailored to site-specific forest management practices, including species selection and risk mitigation strategies and resolving the debate over forest governance, Member State versus EU competence in forest governance, to ensure coherent and predictable future policies. Some proposals, including promoting wood-based products as substitutes for fossil-based applications and establishing site-specific pilot areas where stakeholders can test climate-resilient management practices, were viewed as neutral but potentially beneficial. Measures such as mandatory forest protection quotas or the introduc-

tion of close-to-nature management requirements were more contested.

In Slovenia, stakeholders prioritised updating the national forest strategy with longer operational programmes, strengthening support and education for small forest owners, integrating holistic forest education into schools, revising legislation to allow site-adapted tree species, and setting site-specific forest targets. Measures such as increased bioeconomy investment, improved access to economic advisory services and integrated water-forest planning were perceived as neutral. Participants perceived that establishing a state-owned forest nursery, prioritising management plans only in actively managed regions, and consolidating unmanaged forests from inactive owners, were seen as having limited impact or relevance in practice.

The EU-wide Brussels workshop explored broader European governance issues. Widely supported measures included mapping forest ownership across Europe, enhancing EU-wide data exchange, halting deforestation through effective enforcement by 2030, implementing landscape-scale ecosystem management plans, expanding biorefinery capacity, and allocating rural development funding to support socio-economic transitions. Measures considered neutral included introducing an EU forest budget, phasing out fossil-fuel subsidies, and deploying sustainable biomass heating systems where appropriate. Measures not supported by all participants included an EU Sustainable Consumption Fund, which would use public and private finance to promote sustainable production and land use, with a particular focus on forestry and forest management.

Overall, the workshops combined regional insights with EU-level dialogue, highlighting education, monitoring, governance coordination, and adaptive management as key stepping stones to strengthen Europe’s forest resilience and multifunctionality.



# New report on finding common ground in a divided world



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Developed by the Global Forum on Farm Policy and Innovation (GFFPI) – a collaboration between leading agricultural think tanks from Australia, Canada, the United States and the Forum for the Future of Agriculture – the report on “Finding common ground in a divided world” was published on October 2025.

Developed as a catalyst for conversation, this paper brings together a range of perspectives on global agricultural policy and sustainability. Composed of three sections: “Common Ground”, “Deep Dives” and “What we Learned”, it was designed to frame key issues ahead of a series of dialogues held in October 2025, and to draw on the insights that emerged from those discussions in shaping the final sections of the paper. Together, these dialogues and reflections inform a forward-looking view of where the GFFPI can add the greatest value in strengthening collaboration, innovation, and policy coherence across global agrifood systems.

The report explores how global agriculture can remain both sustainable, resilient and profitable amid profound geopolitical, economic, and environmental change. Through highlighting GFFPI perspectives, expert opinion, and a series of dialogues,

the report explores topics including the shifting centre of gravity in agri-food policy and the challenges facing innovation, food security, and sustainability. The dialogue revealed common concerns: eroding trust in science, widening gaps between ambition and implementation, and the need to align trade, innovation and environmental policies with farm-level profitability.

The old adage says: “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.” That wisdom is more relevant today than ever. In a world that grows more interconnected each year, the notion that any nation can act in isolation and remain untouched by the consequences of its choices is increasingly untenable.

The perspectives gathered here show that while contexts differ across Europe, the United States, Canada, and Australia, the underlying challenges remain deeply connected. The possibilities of collaboration; the risks of policy retrenchment; the interdependence of trade; the necessity for innovation approaches to productivity, sustainability, and resilience.

Taken together, these insights reaffirm a simple but powerful truth: agriculture has the capacity to unite rather than divide. The sector can channel volatility into opportunity when stakeholders choose to collaborate rather than retreat behind borders or vested interests.

The work of the GFFPI has always centred on building spaces where evidence and dialogue take precedence over polarisation. As global agriculture faces escalating pressures - from climate change to shifting trade rules and evolving societal expectations - this role becomes more critical.

The path to resilient, sustainable, and fair food systems lies not in going faster alone, but in going further together. By cultivating trust and focusing on outcomes that matter for people, the planet, and prosperity, the sector can sow enduring common ground for the decades ahead.

Let's increase our food supply  
without  
reducing theirs

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For more information :

[forumforag.com/article/2025-common-ground-report/](https://forumforag.com/article/2025-common-ground-report/)

# Forum for the Future of Agriculture 2026 Annual Conference



**Tuesday, April 14, 2026**  
**09:00 - 18:00 (CET)**

## Currently confirmed speakers

### Overall agenda

08:15 – 09:15	Registration open: Coffee and networking opportunity
09:15 – 09:35	Introduction and welcome
09:35 – 10:15	Inspirational talk
10:15 – 11:15	Session 1: The end of the world as we know it – what are the consequences for agriculture and environment?
11:15 – 11:45	Networking break
11:45 – 13:00	Session 2: How can we finance and accelerate the transition on the ground?
13:00 – 14:00	Lunch and networking break
14:00 – 14:20	Inspirational talk
14:20 – 15:20	Session 3: CAP and Land use – what governance do we need to deliver it?
15:20 – 15:40	Inspirational talk
15:40 – 16:40	Session 4: How will AI redefine what's possible for a profitable, climate-smart, nature-positive agri-food system?
16:40 – 17:00	Presentation of the Soil Award
17:00 – 18:00	Special networking session and meet the Soil Award finalists

 <b>Martin Clough</b> Head CP R&D Digital, Collaboration & Sustainability, Syngenta	 <b>Barry Cowen</b> Member of the European Parliament	 <b>Fabrice DeClerck</b> Chief Science Officer, EAT	 <b>Sandrine Dixon-Declève</b> Global Ambassador for The Club of Rome and Executive Chair, Earth4All
 <b>Nomindari Enkhur</b> CEO, Mongolian Nature's Legacy Foundation	 <b>Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle</b> Director Strategy and Policy Analysis, DG AGRI, European Commission	 <b>Tassos Haniotis</b> Special Advisor for Sustainable Productivity, Director Strategy and Policy Analysis, DG AGRI, European Commission; Senior Guest Research Scholar, IIASA	 <b>Jörg-Andreas Krüger</b> President, NABU
 <b>Janez Potočnik</b> Chair ForumforAg and Chairman RISE Foundation	 <b>Justin Rose</b> President, Worldwide Agriculture & Turf, Small Agriculture and Turf Care, Europe, Africa, and Asia, Deere & Company	 <b>Martin Stuchtey</b> Founder, The Landbanking Group	 <b>Jurgen Tack</b> Secretary General, European Landowners' Organization
 <b>Mark Titterington</b> Director-General, SpiritsEUROPE, Co-founder and member of the Advisory Council, Forum for the Future of Agriculture	 <b>Kurt Vandenberghe</b> Director-General, DG CLIMA, European Commission	 <b>Rose O'Donovan</b> Journalist & Editor, AgriFacts	 <b>Stephen Sackur</b> International Broadcast Journalist

### Confirmed Moderators

### Founding & Strategic partners



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Registration closes one week before conference