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MAGAZINE

Climate adaptation requires room for innovation

FCS General Assembly 2026 in Spain:

Land Stewardship in a changing Europe

European Parliament breakfast
on bioeconomy



FOR FRENCH
VERSION:



Concatedral de Santa María (Cáceres).

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Editorial



Thomas BUBERL, CEO of AXA, rightly points out that Europe no longer knows how to create emotional attachment. The disenchantment affecting the European Union today partly stems from the accumulation of technocratic responses, complex regulations, and promises made without limits, without a sufficiently clear vision emerging to inspire and mobilize citizens.

This reflection applies fully to the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). By trying to support everything and its opposite, without a long-term perspective or clearly defined priorities, we risk further weakening our agriculture.

It is urgent to return to the realities of the rural world. Farmers and local stakeholders need responsibility and freedom of action, not new divisions between categories of farmers. A sustainable policy must recognize the diversity of agricultural models and respect all those who produce, invest, innovate, and maintain our landscapes.

From the British royal family to certain Saudi princes, the media regularly highlight a few spectacular cases of wealthy large landowners benefiting from CAP subsidies. These examples legitimately fuel public debate, but they cannot alone summarize the system’s shortcomings, nor justify systematically opposing small and large farms. Political narratives must not distract us from the diversity of agricultural realities or from the concrete difficulties faced every day in the field.

Despite these challenges, let us remain optimistic. Let us ensure that the European Union regains the ambition to fully confront them: respecting its producers, rebalancing the social contract, strengthening its energy autonomy, restoring a taste for initiative and risk-taking, and building a more balanced and better-controlled migration policy. It is under these conditions that it will regain the trust and attachment of its citizens.

Thierry de l'ESCAILLE
ELO President



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Climate adaptation requires room for innovation



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Dr. Jurgen TACK
ELO Secretary-General

Countryside Magazine: Last summer brought heatwaves, droughts and major wildfires across Europe. Has climate change become a tangible reality for land managers?

Jurgen TACK, Secretary-General of ELO: Absolutely. What scientists have warned about for decades is now part of everyday reality. Farmers, foresters and landowners are experiencing it directly through water shortages, changing growing conditions, forest decline and rising wildfire risks. Mitigation remains essential, but it is no longer enough. We must also adapt our agriculture, forests and natural areas to a climate that is already changing.

Countryside Magazine: What is holding Europe back?

Jurgen TACK: There is a fundamental contradiction: climate adaptation requires change, while much of our legislation was designed to prevent change. European environmental legislation has achieved important results, but the ecological conditions it seeks to protect are themselves changing. Tree species that have thrived for centuries may no longer be suited to future conditions. Crops face new pests, diseases and water stress. Habitats will shift. The question is therefore simple: can we protect ecosystems by asking them to remain unchanged while the climate around them fundamentally changes?

Countryside Magazine: Wildfires make that contradiction particularly visible. What needs to change?

Jurgen TACK: We need to invest much more in prevention. Firefighting is essential, but active landscape management is just as important. Forest thinning, grazing, removing combustible vegetation, creating firebreaks and, where appropriate, prescribed burning can all reduce risk. Yet land managers may face nature, forestry and permitting rules that slow down precisely these measures. A forest maximally protected from human intervention is not necessarily a forest maximally protected from climate change.

Countryside Magazine: Is agriculture facing the same problem?

Jurgen TACK: Yes. Farmers need access to innovation. New genomic techniques, for example, can help develop crops that are more resistant to drought and disease, or that use water and nutrients more efficiently.

Europe has often regulated new technologies through frameworks designed for an earlier generation of innovation. Recent changes to the EU approach to New Genomic Techniques are therefore welcome.

The broader lesson is clear: when innovation moves faster than legislation, regulation intended to protect sustainability can end up becoming an obstacle to achieving it.

Countryside Magazine: Are you calling for weaker environmental legislation?

Jurgen TACK: No. We need smarter and more adaptive legislation. The precautionary principle remains important, but doing nothing also carries risks. Instead of asking only, "How do we preserve what was here?", we should also ask, "What functioning, biodiverse ecosystem can survive here under the climate of 2050?" That requires experimentation, flexibility and adaptive management.

Countryside Magazine: What should Europe do now?

Jurgen TACK: I would introduce a climate adaptation stress test for European legislation. For every major regulation, we should ask: does this make it easier or harder to adapt Europe to the climate of 2050?

We need ambitious environmental objectives, but regulation should become more outcome-based and less prescriptive. Farmers, foresters and land managers need room to develop solutions that work on the ground. Climate adaptation means change. European legislation must not only control that change. It must enable it.

What should Europe do now?

We need ambitious environmental objectives, but regulation should become more outcome-based and less prescriptive. Farmers, foresters and land managers need room to develop solutions that work on the ground.

Climate adaptation means change. European legislation must not only control that change. It must enable it.

Key discussions and Board renewal at the ELO General Assembly in Dublin



Emmanuelle MIKOSZ
Director of
Member States Affairs, ELO

As per tradition, ELO members gathered in Dublin on 2 June for the General Assembly held every six months ahead of the incoming Presidency of the Council of the EU, this time in the run-up to the Irish Presidency beginning on 1 July. Discussions with public authorities and ELO's local network focused on geopolitics, fertiliser prices, CAP reform, biodiversity and forestry. The debate on financing the transition and addressing livestock-related challenges continued during the regional ForumforAg.

Tassos HANIOTIS, Adviser for Sustainable Productivity at ForumforAg, shared his perspective on the pressures facing EU agriculture. He noted that the global agri-trade landscape has shifted structurally, with Brazil and the EU emerging as trade winners while the U.S. has become an increasingly significant net loser, partly due to its reliance on bulk commodities.

At the same time, fertiliser and energy costs have risen sharply and become increasingly volatile. Europe's main challenge, he argued, is a widening cost squeeze, with energy and fertiliser prices remaining structurally higher than in the U.S. because of Europe's natural gas disadvantage.

According to HANIOTIS, improving sustainable productivity will require greater use of precision farming and more efficient, high-quality fertilisers. The technologies already exist, but their uptake remains limited by insufficient policy incentives and regulatory barriers.

Geopolitics, regulation and competitiveness

These issues were further discussed during the *tour de table* led by Secretary General Jurgen TACK. Members highlighted how the war in Ukraine, tensions in the Middle East, shifting U.S. policies and disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz are increasing supply risks and cost pressures for European farmers.

At the same time, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states are investing heavily in agricultural production and technology to reduce their dependence on external suppliers. Successive crises - from COVID-19 to war, trade tensions and energy insecurity - have created an increasingly uncertain environment for farmers and landowners.

Members also warned that excessive regulation can delay access to agricultural innovation, with technologies developed in Europe sometimes reaching the market faster elsewhere. They called for practical and proportionate implementation of



the EUDR and Nature Restoration Regulation, balancing environmental ambition with the economic viability of farms and rural businesses.

Discussions on the proposed CAP and MFF reforms also addressed capping, degressivity and the stronger focus on smaller farms. Members stressed that competitiveness and productivity must remain central alongside social and environmental objectives. ELO members were also encouraged to contribute to consultations on the stress test of the Birds and Habitats Directives.

Board renewal

The General Assembly re-elected Thierry de l'ESCAILLE as ELO President and renewed the Board. We warmly congratulate all those elected and thank the Irish Landowners Organisation and Historic Houses of Ireland for their invaluable support in organising the event.

The next ELO GA will take place in Vilnius, Lithuania from 23 to 25 November, 2026.



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From Art to Agriculture: A journey from Madrid to Toledo

Ahead of the 29th Friends of the Countryside General Assembly, members joined a pre-tour through Madrid and the province of Toledo, exploring Spain's cultural heritage, historic family estates and evolving approaches to rural land management.



Sonsoles ARMENDARIZ MILANS
DEL BOSCH

WE Project Officer - Regional
Coordinator Spain

Across three very different visits, the programme revealed a shared commitment to continuity: preserving artistic expertise, caring responsibly for the land and passing family heritage on to future generations.

A tradition of craftsmanship at Ansorena

The journey began in Madrid at Ansorena, one of Spain's most distinguished names in jewellery, fine art and auctions.

Founded in 1845 as a jewellery workshop, Ansorena was appointed Jeweller to the Spanish Royal Household in 1860. Over the following generations, the family business developed into a leading auction house and art gallery while maintaining its reputation for craftsmanship, discretion and specialist knowledge.

Alfonso MATO, General Manager and a sixth-generation member of the family, introduced the group to the history of the institution and explained how Ansorena has remained continuously active for more than 180 years.

Members discovered several exceptional pieces connected

to the Spanish Royal Household and learned more about the expertise required to authenticate, research and present important works of art. An Ansorena specialist also discussed a recently auctioned Old Master painting by José DE RIBERA, highlighting the role of provenance, scholarship and connoisseurship in the international art market.

The visit concluded with a reception in Ansorena's contemporary gallery, surrounded by works of art - a fitting introduction to Spain's rich cultural heritage and to the days ahead.

Rural hospitality at Valdepalacios

Leaving Madrid, the group travelled towards Oropesa in the province of Toledo, where they stayed at **Valdepalacios**.

Once a private family estate, the property has been transformed into an elegant country hotel while retaining the character of the original residence. Its historic architecture, peaceful surroundings and strong gastronomic identity provided an ideal setting in which members could continue their conversations and enjoy the hospitality of rural Spain.



Ansorena Auction House, one of Spain's most prestigious institutions.



Blanca ENTRECANALES, welcoming the FCS group and sharing the story behind Dehesa El Milagro Estate

Regenerative farming at Dehesa El Milagro

The following morning was devoted to **Dehesa El Milagro**, an estate combining organic production, regenerative agriculture and biodiversity conservation.

Its founder, Blanca ENTRECANALES, welcomed the group and shared the story behind the project. She explained how the estate seeks to produce high-quality food while restoring soil health, encouraging biodiversity and working with natural cycles.

During a tour of the property, members saw how these principles are translated into daily farming practices. The visit demonstrated that environmental responsibility is not treated as a separate activity, but as the foundation of the estate's agricultural model.



Valdepalacios gardens

The experience ended around the table with a lunch prepared using Dehesa El Milagro produce. It offered members the opportunity to experience the connection between healthy land, careful production and the quality and flavour of the final food.

Family heritage at Las Cabezas

The final visit of the pre-tour took place at **Las Cabezas**, where Mercedes CARRANZA and her husband, Rafael GARAY, welcomed the group to their family estate.

They guided members through the residence, agricultural land and vineyards, sharing the history of a property shaped by farming, wine production and a long-established hunting tradition.

The architecture of the house is notably different from that commonly found in the surrounding region. Its distinctive design, together with the historical events witnessed within its walls, gave the visit an additional cultural dimension.

Through family stories and personal recollections, the hosts illustrated how an estate can remain rooted in its history while continuing to evolve as a living rural property.

Following lunch, the group continued to Cáceres, where members joined the official programme of the Friends of the Countryside General Assembly.

Stay connected with Ansorena

Ansorena's monthly newsletter and auction catalogue present upcoming sales, private collections, exceptional jewellery, works of art and rare objects.



FCS General Assembly 2026 in Spain: Land stewardship in a changing Europe



Emmanuelle MIKOSZ
Director of
Member States Affairs, ELO

The debates during this year's Friends of the Countryside General Assembly once again highlighted the role of private landowners as long-term partners in Europe's environmental and food security agenda. A central question ran through the discussions: how can Europe remain competitive, environmentally ambitious and geopolitically resilient at the same time?

The Assembly reaffirmed its support for a strong and independent CAP, with its two-pillar structure preserved and adequately funded. Forests and forestry, biodiversity, climate and the bio-economy were also among the key topics discussed, reflecting the growing expectations placed on Europe's rural areas.

The strong interest in *Innovators by Nature*, co-organised with ELO, was also confirmed. The event highlights practical business models in areas such as biodiversity, eco-tourism, forestry and renewable energy. Its second edition will take place in Brussels in December 2026.

A new generation of countryside entrepreneurs

The programme also showcased the work of Young FCS (YFCS), the growing network of 18- to 35-year-olds interested in rural issues, land management and countryside entrepreneurship.

This spirit of innovation was reflected in the 2026 FAMIGRO Award, presented to Naturfriedhof Ammersee, a woodland burial concept in which each burial takes place at the roots of a selected tree. More info page 11.

From policy to practice

Beyond policy discussions, the Assembly turned to concrete

examples of rural businesses adapting to today's agricultural and environmental challenges.

Ganaderia Pablos, a 410-hectare farm in Trujillo managed according to holistic principles, demonstrated how regenerative livestock farming can be both ecologically sound and economically viable. Its message - "*it's not the cow, it's the how*" - challenged the idea that cattle are inherently harmful. Managed rotational grazing can improve soil structure, rainfall absorption, microbial diversity and carbon sequestration while supporting healthier grasslands.

Finca Pascualete offered a different perspective. With origins dating back to 1232, the estate has transformed a long agricultural tradition into a modern, competitive business. Its farmstead creamery produces traditional sheep's milk cheese using vegetable rennet from wild cardoon thistle. Once a highly local product, it is now exported to more than nine countries and has received international recognition.

The conference concluded with a presentation by CIC on the role of sustainable use in maintaining functional rural landscapes. The discussion stressed that conservation depends not only on environmental ambition, but also on active management, viable rural businesses and cooperation between landowners, farmers, foresters, hunters, scientists and policymakers.

From policy debates to business cases, the 2026 General Assembly showed how environmental, economic and social objectives can reinforce one another when rooted in practical land management.

The next Friends of the Countryside General Assembly will take place in Augsburg, Germany in June 2027.



Members of the Friends of the Countryside in the Gran Teatro Cáceres



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Celebrating excellence in the countryside

One of the most memorable moments of the 2026 Friends of the Countryside General Assembly in Cáceres was the Gala Dinner held at Casa Palacio Huerta del Conde. Nearly 200 members and guests gathered in this historic setting for an evening celebrating friendship, shared values and a common commitment to Europe's rural landscapes and communities.



Stefanie SZALACHY
Senior Project Manager, ELO

A particularly moment of the evening was the presentation of several prestigious awards recognising exceptional dedication and achievements in support of rural communities, cultural heritage and nature conservation. The distinctions presented included the **Recognition for an Inspirational Life Dedicated to the Countryside**, the **Belleuropa Award**, the **Wildlife Estates Label** and the **Famigro Award**.

Through these awards, the Friends of the Countryside paid tribute to individuals, families and organisations whose vision, commitment and leadership continue to make a lasting contribution to the future of Europe's countryside.

Recognition for an Inspirational Life Dedicated to the Countryside

The 2026 General Assembly marked the inaugural presentation of the "Recognition for an Inspirational Life Dedicated to the Countryside", a distinction created to honour individuals whose lifelong commitment, leadership and vision have left a lasting mark on the rural world and inspired generations of landowners, farmers and countryside advocates.

The first recipient of this prestigious recognition was Don Alonso ÁLVAREZ DE TOLEDO Y URQUIJO, XII Marqués de Valdeuza. Through decades of leadership, advocacy and dedication to rural communities, nature conservation and cultural heritage, he has become a respected and admired figure far beyond Spain's borders.

By presenting this award, the FCS paid tribute not only to an exceptional personal achievement, but also to a lifetime devoted to serving and strengthening the rural communities and landscapes that shape our shared European heritage.

Wildlife Estates Label: Recognising responsible estate management

The Wildlife Estates (WE) Label recognises landowners and estate managers whose work demonstrates that productive land use and biodiversity conservation can successfully go hand in hand. Through their efforts, these estates contribute to the protection of wildlife habitats while maintaining vibrant and productive rural landscapes. This year, seven Spanish estates received the distinction:

- Majada Vieja, represented by María de SOLÍS, Condesa de Torralva;



From left to right: Dr. Jurgen TACK, Don Alonso ÁLVAREZ DE TOLEDO Y URQUIJO, Thierry de l'ESCAILLE.

- El Cristo y Valdecasillas, represented by Germán GAMAZO HOHENLOHE, Marqués de Soto Aller;
- Finca Hualdo, represented by José Antonio PECHE;
- El Nebral and Monteagro, represented by Blanca MON-TORO;
- Cerrozamora, represented by Miryam DÍAZ-PATÓN;
- Cortijo Guadiana, represented by Rosa and Francisco VAÑO.

Belleuropa Award: Stewardship across generations

The 2026 Belleuropa Award was presented to Germán GAMAZO for the outstanding management of the El Cristo and Dehesa Valdecasillas Estate.

Established by the late Giuseppe NATTA, the award celebrates exemplary stewardship of Europe's rural landscapes. It honours landowners and estate managers who combine productive activities with the protection of biodiversity, natural resources and cultural heritage.

Extending across approximately 3,500 hectares, El Cristo and Valdecasillas offers an impressive example of how traditional land use, agriculture, livestock farming, hunting and conservation can be managed as part of a coherent whole.

The estate's landscape is characterised by extensive pasturelands scattered with centuries-old holm oaks, cork oaks and pedunculate oaks. Areas of mature Mediterranean vegetation provide valuable habitats for a wide range of species and contribute to the ecological richness of the property.

Agricultural production remains closely linked to the natural rhythms and carrying capacity of the land. Around 760 hectares are cultivated according to a three-year crop rotation, while free-ranging cattle and Iberian pigs graze on traditional pastures. Game management also forms part of the estate's wider environmental approach, with deer and wild boar populations managed across a significant part of the property.

Through long-term planning and careful stewardship, Germán GAMAZO has developed a model that balances economic activity with environmental responsibility. The estate illustrates how private land management can preserve rural heritage while ensuring that the land remains active, productive and resilient.

Members taking part in the post-tour had the opportunity to visit the estate and experience this work first-hand. The visit gave them a deeper understanding of the landscapes, practices and conservation efforts behind the award.

Famigro Award: innovation rooted in place

The Famigro Award highlighted a very different but equally important dimension of rural life: entrepreneurship.

Created by Karl GROTEFELT in 2013, the award supports young European entrepreneurs whose projects contribute to the economic, social and environmental vitality of rural areas. It recognises initiatives that respond practically to contemporary challenges while creating new opportunities for local communities.

The 2026 award was presented to Naturfriedhof Ammersee, a woodland burial initiative in Bavaria, south of Munich.



Félix von PERFALL (winner of the Famigro Award) and Karl GROTEFELT.

Félix von PERFALL accepted the distinction on behalf of the project.

Located within a protected forest ecosystem, Naturfriedhof Ammersee offers an alternative to conventional burial practices. Memorial sites are situated at the roots of selected trees, allowing the woodland itself to become a place of remembrance, tranquillity and reflection.

The approach combines social purpose with sustainable forestry and rural enterprise. Each burial site is discreetly integrated into the landscape, preserving the forest's character and leaving only a minimal visual footprint.

By bringing together environmental responsibility, economic viability and a thoughtful response to changing social needs, Naturfriedhof Ammersee shows how innovation can emerge from a close understanding of place. It is a compelling example of how rural areas can develop new activities without compromising their identity or natural value.

Looking ahead

The recipients honoured in Cáceres represent different generations, sectors and approaches, yet their work is united by a common principle: the countryside remains vibrant when people are willing to take responsibility for its future.

From lifelong leadership and exemplary estate management to conservation and rural entrepreneurship, their achievements demonstrate the continuing importance of individuals, families and locally rooted initiatives.

By recognising their work, the Friends of the Countryside celebrated not only past accomplishments, but also the ideas, values and leadership needed to sustain Europe's rural landscapes and communities for generations to come.

From dialogue to discovery: Exploring Extremadura



Stefanie SZALACHY
Senior Project Manager, ELO

A much-loved feature of every Friends of the Countryside General Assembly is the opportunity to leave the conference room behind and discover the host region first-hand. This year, the "Saturday programme" offered four different routes through Extremadura. The Orange, Red, Blue and Green Tours introduced participants to family estates, farms, vineyards, rural businesses and historic towns. Each itinerary had its own focus, but all showed how closely agriculture, heritage, nature and family life remain connected across the region.

ORANGE TOUR Olive oil, wine and cheese

*Sonsoles ARMENDARIZ MILANS DEL BOSCH,
WE Project Officer - Regional Coordinator Spain*

The Orange tour focused on two family estates with strong links to Extremadura's food and farming traditions.

The first stop was the **Perales de Valdeuza Estate**, where Fadrique ÁLVAREZ DE TOLEDO welcomed the group and introduced the family business. Participants visited the estate's centuries-old olive groves, followed the production process through the modern mill and bottling facilities, and learned how quality, sustainability and traceability are incorporated into every stage.

The estate also includes vineyards, which the group visited before enjoying a tasting and lunch featuring its olive oils and Marqués de Valdeuza wines.

The tour then continued to **Pascualete Estate**, where the FIGUEROA family presented one of the region's best-known cheese-producing properties. A live cheesemaking demonstration gave participants a closer look at the traditional methods behind Pascualete's distinctive cheeses.

The visit also included the family residence, whose architecture and history reflect the long relationship between the family and the estate.

At Pascualete, the Orange and Green tours briefly came to-

gether, allowing members from both groups to share their impressions of the day.

BLUE TOUR Wine, horses and Trujillo

Stefanie SZALACHY, Senior Project Manager, ELO

The Blue tour brought together wine, horses and the historic town of Trujillo.

Participants visited **Bodegas HABLA** and **Dehesa La Torrecilla**, an estate known for its wines, hospitality and Pura Raza Española horses.

During the visit, the group learned more about the winery's approach and the work involved in producing wines with a strong identity. The estate's horse-breeding activities offered another perspective on rural enterprise and on the importance of the Spanish horse within the country's cultural heritage.

Although winemaking and horse breeding are very different activities, both require patience, specialist knowledge and long-term planning. At Dehesa La Torrecilla, they form part of a wider estate model built around quality and continuity.

The day ended in Trujillo, where participants walked through the Plaza Mayor and the surrounding historic streets. Its palaces, churches and stone buildings provided an impressive final stop and a reminder of the region's rich architectural past.



Group picture taken during the Blue tour - focusing on winery's approach and horse-breeding

RED TOUR

Life and farming in the dehesa

*Jehanne VERHAEGEN, Coordinator ELO,
FCS, ForumforAg Brussels*

The Red tour explored the dehesa landscape and the farming traditions that have shaped it over generations.

At **Azagala Estate**, Alonso ÁLVAREZ DE TOLEDO, Marqués de Valdueza, welcomed participants to a property that has been in his family for almost three centuries.

The estate brings together holm and cork oak woodland, livestock farming, forestry and wildlife management. Particular attention was given to its Avileña-Negro Ibérico cattle and to the tradition of transhumance. Each year, cattle move between the dehesas of Extremadura and the mountain pastures of the Sierra de Gredos. This seasonal movement, together with the estate's Merino sheep farming, reflects a system built around the natural availability of pasture and water.

The group then travelled to **Dehesa de Cañas**, in the Sierra de San Pedro, where Joaquín and Amelia PITARCH welcomed participants together with their three children.

After lunch in the courtyard, the PITARCH family introduced the estate's main activities, including Merino sheep, Iberian pigs and the management of its oak pastures.

The visit also led to an open discussion about the challenges faced by a young family managing a rural estate today. Maintaining the property means finding a balance between economic viability, environmental responsibility and the wish to preserve it for the next generation.

GREEN TOUR:

Traditions, livestock and rural resilience

Emmanuelle MIKOSZ, Director of Member States Affairs, ELO

The Green tour looked at the relationship between rural communities, livestock and the environment.

José María RAMOS, founder and director of **Learn from Bulls**, shared his experience of working with rural communities in Spain and Portugal.

Using fighting bulls and sheep farming as examples, he explained how traditional livestock systems have contributed to the management of Iberian landscapes and continue to support local economies.

The discussion also addressed some of the main pressures facing rural communities today, including climate change, depopulation and limited infrastructure.

Participants reflected on the difficulty of maintaining traditional practices when the people, services and knowledge that support them are gradually disappearing.

The tour showed that protecting rural landscapes involves more than conservation alone. It also depends on viable farms, active communities and people who are willing and able to continue working the land.

Four different views of Extremadura

Although the four tours followed different routes, they shared many of the same themes.

Participants met families who are preserving long-established estates while adapting their activities to new economic and environmental realities. They saw how food production, livestock farming, biodiversity, cultural heritage and tourism can form part of the same rural landscape.

Above all, the tours offered a chance to understand Extremadura through the people who live and work there. By opening their homes, farms and estates, the hosts gave members a personal view of the region and of the work involved in keeping its countryside active and alive.



Picture from the Green tour - focusing on traditions, livestock and rural resilience

Post-tour Spain: A living landscape of conservation and innovation

Following the General Assembly in Cáceres, members continued their journey through Spain with a post-tour devoted to land stewardship, biodiversity, and rural innovation.



Stefanie SZALACHY
Senior Project Manager, ELO

The programme began at **Dehesa de Valdecasillas**, managed by Germán GAMAZO. Having received the 2026 Belleuropa Award during the General Assembly, the estate offered a practical example of how agriculture, livestock, hunting, and biodiversity conservation are brought together through long-term stewardship.

The group then moved to **La Ronca** near Escalona, Toledo, owned by Andrea MARAZZI. La Ronca manages agriculture, forestry, hunting, and wildlife observation as a connected system. Evening birdwatching and early-morning wildlife sessions allowed participants to experience how everyday management incorporates active conservation.

Finca Hualdo: From farming to the finished product

A highlight of the tour was **Finca Hualdo**, recipient of the 2026 Wildlife Estates Label. Managing Director José Antonio PECHE introduced a model uniting olive groves, pistachios, Manchega sheep, artisanal cheese, and organic horticulture.

By processing raw materials on site, Finca Hualdo maintains a complete production chain, ensuring quality and traceability. Participants sampled its extra virgin olive oils and cheeses, as well as an innovative olive oil created specifically for children. The visit demonstrated how traditional agriculture can innovate by building on existing knowledge and strengthening connections with consumers.

A masterclass in practical conservation

At La Ronca, Dr. Carlos OTERO (Estate Manager and President of Wildlife Estates Spain) led a masterclass explaining how production and habitat management form a unified long-term strategy.

Using the Wildlife Estates methodology, La Ronca uses “Islands of Biodiversity” and Habitat Capacity Improvement Units (UMECAs) to create refuge and feeding zones across the landscape. These targeted interventions support species such as the Spanish Imperial Eagle, Golden Eagle, Eagle Owl, Wildcat, Otter, and several bat species.



Dr. Carlos OTERO and Hubert ANDRE-DUMONT visiting Dehesa de Valdecasillas



View from La Ronca in Toledo

Measuring the value of nature

The masterclass continued with presentations by María del Rocío LUIS JARA and Blanca MONTORO on the La Ronca pilot project (in cooperation with Wild Square and Territorium), which explores how biodiversity can be measured as a tangible source of value.

Using ecological assessments, remote sensing, GIS monitoring, camera traps, and bioacoustics, the project establishes ecological baselines to help guide management decisions. These tools provide reliable data to demonstrate environmental results, laying the groundwork for emerging mechanisms like Nature Credits that aim to reward verified biodiversity improvements.

Productive, resilient, and alive

The post-tour demonstrated that conservation and productive management can go hand in hand:

- **Valdecasillas** showed long-established estate stewardship
- **Finca Hualdo** illustrated agricultural diversification and high-value production
- **La Ronca** combined practical conservation with scientific monitoring and new environmental market concepts

Together, they highlighted the vital role of private landowners in addressing biodiversity loss and climate change.



Speech by Andrea MARAZZI at La Ronca

Dear Friends,

I am very happy to welcome you to La Ronca. I would like to begin with a famous line from *The Leopard* by Giuseppe TOMASI DI LAMPEDUSA, spoken by Tancredi: **“If we want everything to stay as it is, everything must change.”** For me, these words capture exactly the moment La Ronca is going through. I quote it because it captures very well the moment La Ronca is going through.

The property has belonged to my family since 1960. For many years, it was dedicated to red legged partridge shooting and welcomed guests from across Europe. This sporting tradition shaped the way La Ronca was protected, managed, and cared for, with close attention to game, wildlife, and natural habitats.

Agriculture always remained marginal, allowing the estate to preserve a special balance and a remarkable richness of species.

After the 1990s, as shooting and active land management gradually declined, biodiversity also began to suffer. In 2014, we therefore decided to restore a more structured approach to the estate, with the same spirit of care that had guided it in the past.

A further and decisive impulse came through Carlos OTERO and Wildlife Estates, whose experience helped us adopt a more scientific approach to biodiversity regeneration, leading to concrete measures to improve habitats and strengthen the ecological balance of La Ronca.

Today, society and institutions are beginning to recognize the value of ecosystem restoration, biodiversity, and sustainable land management. This is encouraging, but it is not enough. We need to turn these efforts into a virtuous system that creates environmental, economic, and patrimonial value.

In this vision, shooting is not separate from biodiversity management. At La Ronca, it has always been part of the estate's identity and of a wider cycle of habitat care, wildlife balance, and long term stewardship.

This brings us back to Tancredi's words. If we want La Ronca to remain what it is — a living place, rich in nature, history, wildlife, and sporting identity — we must allow it to evolve. We must change the tools, the language, and the management model, without betraying the original spirit of the estate.

For this reason, I would like to introduce Alicia PALACIOS, Professor of Agriculture at the Universidad Politécnica de Madrid y Rocío Luis JARA, Master Student, Carlos OTERO MUERZA, President of Wildlife Estates España, Blanca MONTORO and Daniel SUÁREZ, and the Territorium Team, whose technical and scientific contribution is proving essential in mapping, measuring, and assessing La Ronca's potential in terms of nature credits.

Our goal is to build a model that enhances biodiversity, recognizes natural capital, and gives a concrete future to estates such as La Ronca.

Andrea MARAZZI



From research to policy: PathFinder's vision for European forest monitoring



Pierre LE MAITRE
Project & Policy Officer, ELO

On 16 June 2026, the PathFinder Final Conference brought together researchers, policymakers, European institutions and stakeholder organisations in Brussels to discuss the future of forest monitoring in Europe.

Building a European monitoring system

The conference marked the conclusion of the PathFinder project and presented its European Forest Monitoring System (EFMS) prototype. By combining National Forest Inventories (NFIs), ICP Forests field observations and Earth Observation technologies, the project explored how Europe could produce more consistent, timely and policy-relevant information on its forests.

Participants were introduced to high-resolution mapping tools, statistical estimation methods, scenario modelling and an interactive portal. Together, these tools demonstrate how field data and remote sensing can be combined to improve forest information and support areas such as greenhouse gas reporting under the LULUCF sector.

Combining field data and remote sensing

A key conclusion emerged clearly: no single source of information is sufficient on its own. Earth Observation technologies are particularly useful for identifying and mapping forest disturbances quickly and across large areas, but satellite imagery cannot replace high-quality observations collected in the field.

National Forest Inventories and ICP Forests therefore remain essential. Their long-term datasets provide the reference information needed to interpret remote-sensing data accurately and understand changes in forest condition, biodiversity and carbon stocks over time.

The project also showed that combining field observations with remote sensing can improve both forest maps and statistical estimates, confirming that an integrated European approach is technically feasible.

Governance at the heart of the debate

Beyond the scientific results, governance was a recurring theme throughout the conference. The proposed European Forest Monitoring and Analysis framework, EUFEMIA, would require close cooperation between the European Commission, Member States, National Forest Inventories and forest stakeholders.



Panel discussion at the Pathfinder's conference

These questions came to the fore during the closing panel discussion with Jurij KRAJCIC of DG CLIMA, Valerie LAINER-FINDEIS of Land&Forst Betriebe Österreich, Roberto STELSTRA of EUSTAFOR, Zoltan KUN of WILD Europe, Rasmus ASTRUP of NIBIO and Jurgen TACK of ELO.

Panellists discussed how greater European coordination could improve the consistency, comparability and usability of forest information while respecting national responsibilities and existing monitoring systems. Data ownership, confidentiality and the sharing of National Forest Inventory information were also highlighted as important issues for future implementation.

Better information for better decisions

For landowners and forest managers, the debate is not only about what can be measured, but also about how information is used in policy. Monitoring should support better decisions without creating unnecessary administrative burdens or overlooking the diversity of forest conditions and management approaches across Europe.

The conference concluded with a clear message: integrated European forest monitoring is both achievable and increasingly necessary. By combining reliable field observations with modern Earth Observation technologies, Europe can strengthen the evidence base for climate action, biodiversity conservation and sustainable forest management. Its success, however, will depend as much on governance and trust as on technology.

European Parliament breakfast on bioeconomy

On 9 July 2026, ELO organised a breakfast meeting in the framework of the European Parliament's Biodiversity, Hunting and Countryside Intergroup. Hosted by MEP Stefan KÖHLER in Strasbourg, to discuss how the bioeconomy can strengthen Europe's rural resilience and strategic autonomy, with a particular focus on the contribution of the Horizon Europe PathFinder project.



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



Anne MARCHADIER
Business Development
Director, ELO



MEP Norbert LINS with ELO delegation in Strasbourg

Opening the event, MEP Stefan KÖHLER (EPP, AGRI/ENVI) stressed that the bioeconomy must deliver tangible economic benefits for those managing the land, becoming an additional source of income for farmers and forest owners while enhancing Europe's competitiveness and strategic autonomy. Echoing positions he has consistently defended in Parliament, he called for less regulation and bureaucracy and urged policymakers to move from discussion to implementation through practical, farmer-friendly policies.

The PathFinder project presented its vision for a bottom-up European Forest Monitoring System combining National Forest Inventories with remote sensing to deliver harmonised, annual and high-resolution forest data. Such a system would provide a stronger evidence base for policymaking on carbon stocks, biomass, forest health and the sustainable use of forest resources. While technically feasible, its success will depend on stronger governance, Member State commitments to share data and closer institutional coordination.

Speaking on behalf of the General Association of Wheat Producers (AGBP), David VINCENT highlighted the strategic role of the cereal sector in Europe's bioeconomy, arguing that sustainably produced biomass should be recognised as a key resource for achieving the EU's climate, energy and competitiveness objectives. He emphasised the contribution of first-generation biofuels to greenhouse gas reductions and the circular economy

through valuable co-products, and called for an ambitious Bioeconomy Strategy that encourages investment, expands markets for sustainable biomass and recognises farmers as central actors in Europe's bio-based economy.

Representing Familienbetriebe Land und Forst, Max von ELVERFELDT argued that the bioeconomy must be built around the farmers and forest owners who manage Europe's land. Given the long investment cycles in forestry, he stressed the need for predictable and coherent policies, regulatory certainty and functioning markets that encourage investment, create added value in rural areas and fully integrate land managers into bio-based value chains.

Hinse BOOSTRAT (Bayer) underlined that a strong bioeconomy is essential to decarbonise sectors such as construction, transport, chemicals and energy while supporting agricultural adaptation to climate change. He argued that policy incentives will be needed to overcome the competitive advantage of fossil-based products and called for a more pragmatic regulatory framework enabling farmers to access innovative technologies, alongside open international trade to secure sustainable biomass supply.

The European Bioeconomy Industry Consortium stressed that the Bioeconomy Strategy should provide a strong and ambitious framework to strengthen Europe's competitiveness, resilience and strategic autonomy. EBIC called for greater regulatory coherence across EU legislation and policy initiatives to create a predictable and enabling framework for innovation, investment and market uptake. They stressed the need to scale up industrial deployment and remove barriers to commercialisation so that innovative biological solutions can contribute to more resilient and competitive agriculture.

Participants agreed that fossil-based products continue to enjoy significant economic advantages, while bio-based solutions are often held back by fragmented and sometimes contradictory EU legislation. A recurring message was that the bioeconomy is politically encouraged but too often constrained in practice, underlining the need for a more coherent, pragmatic regulatory framework that supports innovation, investment and large-scale deployment.



Young Friends of the Countryside workshop at the General Assembly in Cáceres

The Art of Transmission: Culture and corporate governance in an age of acceleration. Passing on more than business.

On Friday afternoon, 24 Young Friends met at Casa Pizarro Hotel, welcomed by hosts Joaquín PITARCH and Amelia KEANE.

After a brief introduction by Youssef DIB of Apricus Wealth Management, participants split into three groups led by Elisabeth VAN EVERDINGEN, Giorenzo TREVES DE BONFILI and Hans-Christian VON ARNIM for a two-hour workshop on family transmission.

The lively discussion focused on family transmission, beginning with personal stories before moving to the core values that underpin family businesses, including honesty, discipline, collaboration and respect. Participants also explored future responsibilities, family purpose and legacy.

To conclude, each group presented its main takeaways. The workshop highlighted a strong sense of shared responsibility and curiosity among the next generation of Friends.



Group picture of the Young Friends of the Countryside

The General Assembly is more than a place to discuss the future of the countryside. For the Young Friends, it is also an opportunity to build friendships, exchange ideas and strengthen a growing European network. We asked two participants their impressions.



Claudia NAVARRO LÓPEZ

Member of the Young Friends Executive Committee



For me, the greatest value of the General Assembly is the sense of connection it creates. It is an opportunity to strengthen friendships built over the years, meet new people and exchange experiences with others who share a strong commitment to family, business and the countryside. Despite our different backgrounds and nationalities, we often face similar questions and share many of the same hopes, challenges and ambitions.

I find it especially valuable to hear how others approach succession, responsibility and the future of their family businesses. That openness, the willingness to share honestly and the opportunity to learn from one another are what make these gatherings so inspiring.

Caspar VON REDEN

YFCS member & intern



For me, the most valuable part of this year's General Assembly was meeting new people and connecting with members from across Europe who share similar interests and challenges. And there is still room to grow our network, in Albania, Romania, countries where ELO and FCS are less represented.

Being involved in ELO and FCS has also given me new perspectives on agriculture, forestry and cultural heritage, and I believe the younger generation still has a great deal to contribute in these areas.

Cáceres itself was a wonderful setting, with great hospitality and a programme that reflected the character of the region. The estate visits and FCS Gala dinner were particular highlights. This year also reminded me that we need greater visibility across Europe, so that more people understand who we are, what we stand for and the role our network can play in the future of the countryside.

Forum Regional conference visits Ireland prior to Irish Presidency of the EU Council

The Forum for the Future of Agriculture's Regional Conference moderated by Rose O'DONOVAN was held on June 2 in Ireland, ahead of the Irish EU Council Presidency starting July 1. It brought together policymakers, farmers, scientists, and investors to debate agri-food transformation, financing the transition, sustainable livestock, and the future of the CAP.



Liz WILSON

Driving agri-food transformation

MEP Nina CARBERRY called for a standalone CAP with €433 billion in funding, ring-fenced eco-schemes, and flexibility for different farming systems. She warned against European complacency on food security. Mark TITTERINGTON of the ForumforAg struck a dual tone, optimistic about unprecedented public and private capital circling agriculture, but pessimistic about regulatory barriers blocking carbon farming and biological tools. Stewart GEE of Climate KIC expressed frustration at the slow pace of change, citing the complexity of aligning products across national inventories, sustainability programmes, and advisory systems. Martin VOSS of the Oath Group showcased soil microbiome technology, microbial consortia that doubled yields in Rwanda and reduced water needs by 30% in Mediterranean trials.

Financing the transition

Brendan DUNFORD presented the Burren's results-based payment model, framed around "pocket, head and heart" — paying farmers for ecosystem services, providing local advisory support, and giving them ownership of the narrative. Douglas MCMILLAN highlighted peatlands as Ireland's third-largest agricultural emission source, proposing graduated water-table payments and paludiculture to give farmers viable income from rewetted land. Jurgen TACK of ELO criticised slow EU policy development, noting carbon farming organisations in Europe dropped from 550 to 37, and announced ELO's own investment certificate enabling direct private investment in biodiversity, bypassing regulatory delays. Matteo VANZINI of Climate KIC's Place Finance Lab introduced "resilience dividends" — place-based finance combining public, private, and philanthropic capital into single payment structures for farmers.

Sustainable livestock

DG AGRI's Brigitte MISSONE outlined five pillars of

the EU livestock strategy due July 7: crisis resilience, competitiveness on quality, sustainability through extensification and precision, territoriality for rural communities, and excellence across all systems. The EEA's Jan-Erik PETERSEN made the biodiversity case for extensive grazing, noting one-third of Habitats Directive habitats depend on traditional grazing across 35 million hectares. IUCN's Blandine CAMUS urged policy coherence across agriculture, diets, biodiversity, and climate. Elaine HOULIHAN, a young farmer from Limerick, gave a candid testimony, her family's suckler herd shrank from 150 to 40, and she cannot see a future in farming without access to land, finance, and policies rewarding environmental public goods.

CAP and European Competitiveness Fund

DG GROW's Alben TANEVA presented the proposed €450 billion European Competitiveness Fund consolidating 14 programmes, with a dedicated agriculture and bioeconomy window. DG AGRI's Ricard RAMON confirmed a minimum €300 billion CAP budget to 2034, with €48 billion for rural areas and a strengthened young farmer package. MEP Barry COWEN closed by demanding food security equal weight with defence, rejecting 20% CAP cuts, and insisting: "The era of asking farmers to do more for less has to end."

For the full version of the summary visit the website www.forumforag.com

Let's increase our food supply
without
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"Those who own and manage land will be judged by the state in which we hand it over to the next generation. Innovation is not a threat to this responsibility - it is necessity, both moral and economic. If we want nature to thrive, we must find ways to make sustainability and economic resilience work together."

- Jurgen Tack, ELO Secretary General



Dr. Jurgen TACK
ELO Secretary-General



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