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**European Biodiversity
Conference**





Editorial

Thierry de l'ESCAILLE, Executive President

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The current debate on NBTs-NGTS, although more reasonable than many other chapters of the Green Deal, is a sobering one!

Our decision-making systems seem to make it impossible for the various stakeholders to cooperate, even when we know that our future and that of our children is at stake. When a remarkable invention appears on the scene, we often wonder what effects it might have on our society, and even on the future of humankind, and rightly so. It all depends on the legal and moral framework, on the purposes for which such an invention will be used, and on how it will be supervised.

One of the greatest marvels of recent years has been the development of CRISPR, perfected by a French and an American researcher, earning them the Nobel Prize in Chemistry 8 years after the publication of their work: a technique for editing the human genome that has many other applications in the field of living organisms.

The progress generated in medical terms is simply exceptional. Applying this technology to plants, as proposed by the Commission, will make agriculture more resilient and, above all, less impactful. Faced with such hope, we must of course legislate intelligently to avoid any perverse use, but we must also manage this issue responsibly to give new technologies a chance in today's atmosphere of mutual detestation and generalised mistrust.





2023 European Biodiversity Conference Protecting Europe's Ecosystems - the challenge of Invasive Species Management

The 2023 edition of the European Biodiversity Conference was organised under the auspices of the European Parliament Intergroup "Biodiversity, Hunting, Countryside", and took place in Brussels on November 28.

Mafalda COUTINHO, ELO

Jurgen TACK, Secretary general of ELO and conference moderator, welcomed attendees and emphasised the significance of the discussed topic where challenges were posed by Invasive Alien Species (IAS) amid climate change.

Hans STIELSTRA, Deputy head of "Natural Capital and Ecosystem Health" from the European Commission addressed the escalating challenges posed by invasive species, exacerbated by climate change, leading to ecological harm to native species and habitats. This poses economic threats to fisheries and agriculture and introduces health concerns due to the spread of once-rare diseases by mosquitoes. In response, the regulation introduced in 2014 emphasises risk assessments and requires member states' approvals for control measures. The strategy involves prevention efforts to stop the introduction of invasive species, management through early detection and eradication, restoration of affected native habitats, and active engagement with local communities to address and mitigate the

impacts of invasive species.

Jos RUTTEN, ANB Managing Director, focused on the IAS (Invasive Alien Species) policy in the Flemish region and cited the impactful role of IAS on biodiversity, stressing that among 1,872 species at risk in Europe, 19% (354 species) face threats from invasive species. The National Action Plan to prevent their unintentional spread involves early-stage eradication and effective management of widespread infestations, with LIFE projects contributing to these efforts. A primary focus was placed on public awareness, implemented through a national pathway action plan, the Alterias project, and the Home Sweet Home campaign.

Ana Cristina CARDOSO (PhD), from the Joint Research Centre, opened the first panel by discussing the transformation of alien species into IAS. Notably, the 2014 regulation identifies IAS as a union concern, with climate change exacerbating threats, such as ants from the western Mediterranean surviving in northern Europe. IAS have

far-reaching consequences for food production, water security, and human health. The European Alien Species Information Network (EASIN) is crucial, harmonising data and providing management guidelines. Cooperation among various entities, effective communication, and citizen engagement are emphasised. Education, including an online course for young scientists, is proposed to enhance understanding and address the challenges.

Dany BYLEMANS, from pcfuit & KULeuven, discussed the impact of invasive species on Belgian fruit production, focusing on the Fruit Fly (*Drosophila suzukii*) and the Stinkbug (*Halyomorpha halys*). Fruit flies have posed a significant threat to crops like blueberries and strawberries since November 2011, with damage severity depending on weather conditions. Stinkbug is controlled by introducing species that naturally consume their eggs. The talk explored factors contributing to increased pests, including global trade and climate change. The concept of functional agrobiodiversity

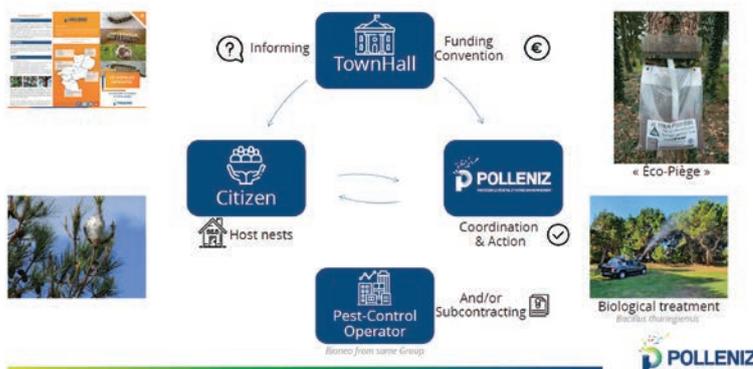
Citizen Science: crucial role in monitoring and management of IAS



“Invasive Alien Species in Europe” App & Web App

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Collective Fight on-demand against dangerous caterpillars



Why this increase in invasive species?



Climate change? Globalised trade ?
Or both ?

Konstantin GOSPODINOV, IUCN – European Biodiversity Conservation Coordinator, explained that their approach includes 265 measures, offering prevention resources like informative factsheets. The strategy features surveillance guides for humane IAS management, emphasising good practices with examples like water hyacinth and pampa grass. The organisation commits to assisting others in IAS management, highlighting the role of proper land management and collaboration to reduce IAS impact.

The round table discussion counted with the panellists who were joined by land managers from Lithuania, Scotland, and Belgium: Algis GAIZUTIS, James JOICEY, and Valérie VANDENABEELE. Participants engaged in a dynamic exchange of ideas and concerns, shedding light on the challenges and complexities surrounding the management of these species. Concerns were raised about whether it was too late for public awareness efforts since invasive species are often misperceived as native. It was suggested to re-evaluate strategies to halt invasive species, underscoring the importance of efficient prevention measures. Government financial support for landowners and the stringency of legislation in protecting native species was questioned. Other concerns were raised about achieving nature regulation goals while facing restrictions on the use of invasive species for land and crop protection. The discussion highlighted the significance of listing the impacts of IAS on the environment, biodiversity, and production landscapes. Overall, the conversation emphasised the urgent need for a holistic and collaborative approach to effectively address the challenges posed by IAS. Participants underscored the importance of public awareness, efficient prevention strategies, and government support in tackling this complex issue.

as a strategy, balancing advantages like pest control and constraints such as a potential increase in the vole population, was introduced. The discussion also considered farmers' willingness to adopt control measures, acknowledging constraints like time and funding.

Donovan BALDUCCI, Biodiversity Manager at Polleniz Group, outlined a three-fold strategy (prevention, monitoring, and active intervention) for protecting biodiversi-

ty. Initiatives include a regional plan against invasive aquatic rodents and the impactful “Vesp Action” program. The “Polleniz” program, with 5,120 members, emphasises prevention, vigilant monitoring, and collective intervention, demonstrating a proactive approach to environmental challenges. Its effectiveness stems from a robust network facilitating early detection and ensuring a prompt and efficient response to emerging issues.

For more information about ELO's future and past events, as well as publications and on-going projects, please visit our the website.



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“LIFE PollinAction” and “SPEAR® Bioinsecticide by Vestaron” bring home the top prizes in the tenth edition of the European Bee Award

With a ceremony held at the European Parliament and hosted by MEP Franc BOGOVIČ, the award recognized a scalable model for pollinators' habitat restoration and recreation, and a novel peptide bioinsecticide.

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The European Bee Award honoured its Decennial and once again brought together several projects and initiatives working to protect pollinators and bees. The European Bee Award was established in 2014 by the European Landowners' Organization (ELO) and the European Agricultural Industry Association (CEMA) to acknowledge innovative, efficient, and scalable projects protecting bees and pollinators, underlining the importance of continuous innovation and research activities to safeguard their vital ecosystems.

Now on its tenth edition, the winners of the 2023 European Bee Award are:

- **Category 'Land management practices':** the winner is LIFE PollinAction “Actions for

boosting pollination in rural and urban areas”. PollinAction is a LIFE project aimed at increasing landscape heterogeneity and connectivity through the creation of a Green Infrastructure (GI) in rural and urban landscapes, as a tool to mitigate the pollination crisis, increase pollinator provision and help develop multifunctional spaces. The project developed complementary activities targeting both habitat restoration/recreation and policy implementation.

- **Category 'Innovative and technological solutions':** the winner is SPEAR® Bioinsecticide by Vestaron. SPEAR® is a novel peptide bioinsecticide, developed targeting a class of peptides that could kill insect and mite pests efficiently, but would be safe for humans, birds, fish, pollinators,

and the environment. The company developed a proprietary platform for peptide optimization and for fermentation-based production, to yield a wide variety of peptide-based solutions for crop protection challenges.

For the first time this year there were **two Special Mentions** of the Jury assigned. The recognitions were granted to:

- Vesp'Action by Polleniz, an initiative to contribute to the biodiversity protection against the invasive species *Vespa Velutina*, with key citizen contributions through the flagging of possible nests. Find more information here.

- TOXIBEES, by Label BEE FRIENDLY, an online tool to quickly access information



on the toxicity of any pesticide towards bees and pollinating insects. Find more information here.

During the ceremony, which also saw the presence of numerous previous winners, the host of the event MEP Franc BOGOVIČ said: "All the past participants and projects we have honoured with the European Bee Award exemplify the spirit of innovation and dedication required to make a positive impact. The urgency of our cause cannot be overstated. Bees, butterflies, and other pollinators are the buzzing heroes of food supply, pollinating many different types of crops that make up the foundation of our diets. In the face of challenges faced by the population of pollinators today, it is our shared responsibilities to champion initiatives that not only recognize the importance of the creatures, but actively help them. Let us continue to work hard, for the bees are not only the keepers of our ecosystem, but also the barometers of our environmental integrity".

Intervening to the event Hans STIELSTRA, Deputy Head of Unit of the Natural Capital and Ecosystem Health at European Commission's DG ENVI intervened at the event commented: "The European Commission has, already with the European Green Deal, proposed many measures in support of pollinators, which are essential for ecology, economy and food production. More recently, we have introduced a New Deal for Pollinators, including a large number of actions. Some of them focus on research and innovation and it is therefore a pleasure to have some of those innovators here today".

Thierry de l'ESCAILLE, Executive President of ELO had positive words for the winners of the Land management practices category, remarking "This category recognizes practically oriented projects. The project rewarded this year is not just about theory, but the development of a practical and scalable model, which makes it especially interesting for land managers, as well as the development of the idea of payment for ecosystem services which is at the forefront of our own conception of sensible European policy that would reward landowners in their sustainable practices".

Gilles DRYANCOUR, Chairman of the CEMA Strategic Committee and member of the Bee Award Jury said: "From its conception in December 2013, the European Bee Award aimed at recognizing innovative projects that could contribute to a better protection of pollinators. This year's winner of the Innovative and Technological solutions category does just that. It harnesses the potential of what was created by nature, the peptides from spider venom, to create a biopesticide that is very effective, and safe, particularly for pollinators".

In 2023, the European Bee Award competition received 35 applications from 16 different European countries. This tenth edition's award ceremony gathered over 90 participants, including: beekeepers, policy makers, land managers, academia and representatives of the agri-food sector exchanged best practices, while getting inspired by new ideas on how to protect bees and enhance biodiversity in Europe.

To learn more about this award please visit:

 www.europeanlandowners.org

 www.cema-agri.org

 #EUBeeAward



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First 'Perceptions and Insights' report on developing and scaling regenerative agriculture



Mark TITTERINGTON, Co-Founder and Director of the Forum for the Future of Agriculture



The food and agriculture system possesses the human know-how and ingenuity, innovation and technology, and natural capital, to increase its productivity, resilience, and sustainability, as well as restoring lost biodiversity, reducing its own carbon footprint and removing billions of tonnes of carbon from the atmosphere and locking it up in soil, forests, peatland and wetlands.

Realising this potential has never been more urgent and regenerative agriculture, whilst not a panacea, may prove to be one of the leading solutions to this challenge.

Whilst interest has grown considerably in this approach over the past decade, it is also true that differences of opinion have emerged on the costs and benefits and how to develop and scale it further.

Over the past year, we have undertaken an inquiry designed to deepen the understanding of these different perspectives both in Europe and the United States and beyond. Through a series of workshops, interviews and consultation with the Forum's network, we focused on capturing insights, ideas and solutions for developing and scaling regenerative agriculture from farmers and land managers; the agri-food value chain; and from policy-makers, civil society and key opinion leaders.

We were particularly interested in how these groups of stakeholders viewed regenerative agriculture and what they saw as the potential benefits and costs. We also wanted to understand what these stakeholders saw as the barriers to developing and scaling and, conversely, what would enable the accelerated adoption of regenerative agriculture.

These insights and perspectives are contained in the report which follows. This is not a conventional research report but – in keeping with the influential convening role that the Forum aspires to play – attempts to give voice to those stakeholders who can and will play a key role in determining the extent to which regenerative agriculture is further developed and scaled in Europe and beyond. In doing so, our hope is that it will catalyse practical ideas and thinking on how to speed up the adoption of regenerative agriculture and, where relevant, similar approaches to building a more resilient and sustainable food system.

With the alarming loss of biodiversity, in an important part caused by unsustainable

agriculture practices, growing pressure on the eco-systems upon which the food

system depends, and the increasingly apparent transition from 'global warming' to 'global boiling', the need for urgent action could not be greater. It is for this reason that regenerative agriculture, whilst not a silver bullet, appears so prominently in the Forum's Call to Action that we announced earlier this year, and why we are pleased to publish this report.

We hope it stimulates thinking and catalyses action.

Our first 'Perceptions and Insights' report on developing and scaling regenerative agriculture in Europe and beyond is now available in French as well as English.

More information :
www.forumforag.com

Key takeaways



1 With improving soil health at its core, regenerative agriculture is broadly inclusive and has the potential to unlock a range of environmental sustainability and climate-related benefits whilst increasing long-term farm productivity

2 Strong scientific evidence base for soil health can and should be used to inform formulation of robust 'outcome-based' metrics for regenerative agriculture which will enable the tracking of progress and avoidance of 'green-washing' claims

- i. independent verification of outcomes seen as a necessary backstop

3 A compelling economic case is vital to covering the costs and incentivising growers to make and sustain the transition

- i. requires development of predictable and durable market-based revenue streams (the most likely of which are payments for decarbonizing the value chain (e.g. Scope III emission reductions and for carbon removal credits to be used beyond the value chain)
- ii. public funding (e.g. through the CAP) should be simplified, to improve access and alleviate the administrative burden, and the value increased (to cover costs of transition and any 'yield drag')
- iii. use of data generated by growers, through participation in market based or public subsidy schemes linked to improvements in soil health/regenerative agriculture could be used to unlock other financial benefits such as preferential rates for farm loans, mortgages and insurance

4 Policy interventions can and should be part of the equation, by helping to enable or de-risk the transition, particularly increasing access to information and advice, technology and innovation, rules for new market-based revenue streams and necessary infrastructure

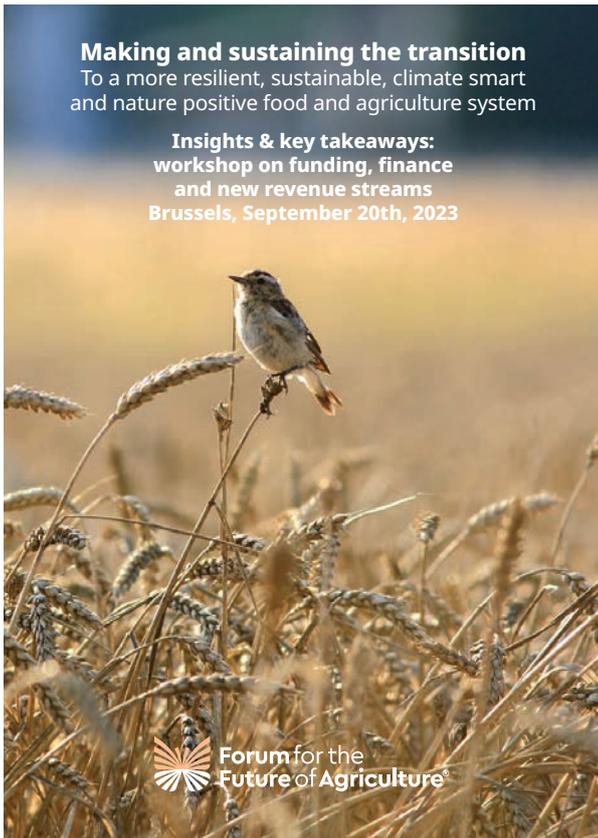
- i. coherence and consistency are critical and a 'filter' through which a policy can be assessed for its impact on enabling the goal of developing and scaling regenerative to be met would be a positive innovation
- ii. policies assessed to have the greatest impact should be expedited to help achieve the goal quicker

5 Achieving the goal requires systematic alignment of knowledge sharing, innovation and technology, finance, and collaboration across the value chain with farmers and land managers, at the centre

- i. need to combine the various nodes of activity on regenerative agriculture taking place across the value chain

New report on making and sustaining the transition to a more resilient, sustainable, climate smart and nature positive food and agriculture system

Mark TITTERINGTON, Co-Founder and Director of the Forum for the Future of Agriculture



the development and scaling of regenerative agriculture that we organised a specific workshop with the key stakeholders to explore key elements in further detail in autumn 2023.

Although the workshop was held under the Chatham House rule, a report has been published that summarises some of the key insights and takeaways.

For more information: www.forumforag.com

2. The role of public funding and access to private finance

Key takeaways

1. Public funding and access to private finance go hand-in-hand and when combined could provide a key part of the equation.
2. Data and evidence is key to demonstrating that 'sustainability pays' and justifying targeted, bespoke public funding and unlocking access to financial instruments at preferential rates.
3. Potential for extension of public-private partnerships to unlock longer term lending for the transition at lower rates for farmers.

5. Final thought and next steps

Finally, we asked the workshop participants to use 1-2 words to describe that they thought will enable the funding and financing for farmers and land managers to make and sustain the transition to regenerative agriculture.

From what you heard today, use 1-2 words to describe what will enable us to fund and finance farmers making and sustaining the transition to regenerative agriculture?

Wordcloud Poll: 47 responses; 24 participants

Over the past year, the Forum for the Future of Agriculture has conducted a perceptions inquiry into what it would take to develop and scale regenerative agriculture in Europe. As part of this exercise, we held a series of workshops posing this question to farmers and land managers; actors within the agri-food value chain and industry stakeholders; and with policymakers and key opinion leaders. In each group, we explored their definition of regenerative agriculture; the benefits and costs; barriers to adoption; and what it would take to accelerate the development and scaling of regenerative agriculture. This was supplemented by bilateral interviews and consultation with the Forum's own extended network.

One of the key insights and takeaways from this inquiry was the importance of funding and financing farmers and land managers to not only make but to sustain the transition to regenerative agriculture. This topic appears to be so central to



Digitalisation, AI and sustainable agriculture



Artificial intelligence is suddenly all around us and people have adapted to using it at lightning speed. What is not clear yet is how digitalisation and AI will change agriculture. What are the challenges and opportunities? Will there still be farmers on the land? Will humans still make decisions? What role can policy play? With these questions Jurgen TACK, Secretary General, European Landowners' Organization, opened the seminar co-organised in the European Parliament with MEPs Franc BOGOVIČ and Petros KOKKALIS and IEEP, in January 2024.

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Summarized by Liz WILSON

Setting the scene

Petros KOKKALIS emphasised the role of data and the need for harmonized data collection which has to be the foundation of evidence-based policy. *"It's really important to have this data and use evidence-based policy as a way to build back trust with farmers and consumers,"* he said.

Franc BOGOVIČ introduced himself as a small farmer as well as an MEP. As someone who is close to rural farmers, he was keen to address how to ensure the digital gap between rural and urban areas does not increase. On one hand, Europe has seen

success with "smart villages" with excellent connectivity. On the other, it needs to equal ensure access to more expensive advanced machinery. Young farmers are vital players, with their understanding of digitalisation and AI – but policymakers need an alliance with all farmers.

Tassos HANIOTIS, Special Advisor for Sustainable Productivity, Forum for the Future of Agriculture, emphasised with the mixed picture we see from the many references to digitalisation and AI we see around us. Some are optimistic, some highlight risks. The reality is neither black nor white. Technologies are neutral, and it is their uses that should concern us. Agriculture has always been at the front of technology development, especially digital applications, and Europe should be very proud of how technology is already being used.

SESSION 1:

Supporting an inclusive, sustainable and resilient digital future in agriculture: the role of policy

Data has a pivotal role: fundamental to AI, digitalisation and science-based policymaking. This was at the heart of the detailed and comprehensive keynote presentation given by Josse De BAERDEMAEKER, Professor Mechatronics, Biostatistics and Sensors (MeBioS), KE Leuven.

"Artificial intelligence starts with data and the challenges that come from that data as well as from the adoption of AI in agri-food," he said. "The value chain is not only a product chain but also a data chain." Data is "possibly the new gold", with data sources and outputs everywhere: data from weather, soil, seeds, water quality and wa-

ter needs, historical yields, fertilizers, land management, satellite images, robots, harvest, storage and so on.

Ethics was also an important topic, as many of the issues and questions have to do with trust. “Who owns the data – that’s a question that goes around all the time,” said Professor De BAERDEMAEKER.(...) Data-based algorithms can have bias. He gave the example of an algorithm that maximizes profits, perhaps at the cost of depleting a farmer’s soil. On the other hand, bias can be positive – for example, a model that aims to maximize biodiversity.

The policy perspective came next from Evangelia MOURMOURA, Administrator, Data Protection and Governance, European Commission. Digitalisation is not a one-size-fits-all solution, but requires careful planning, investments and capacity building. A supportive policy environment plays a major role in 1) boosting the uptake of digital technologies by farmers and 2) unlocking the potential of data. *“Digitalisation connects and links the dots between all the operators. Policy has an important role to play so that everyone profits from the benefits of digitalisation”* she emphasised.

Organic agriculture was next on the panel’s agenda. Bram MOESKOPS, Managing Director, FiBL Europe, defined “sustainable agriculture” as being about agro-ecology. *“Can digitalisation support agro-ecology?”* he asked. To do so, it needs to support more complex systems, such as complex cropping practices, and not facilitate further intensification and expansion of monoculture. *“It is about empowering the farmers, not making farmers slaves of the tools. Enabling the farmers to make better decisions, not just providing a recipe.”* He also highlighted that digital technology is not “clean” because of its dependence on huge networks of energy-intensive physical devices. It is important to check not only the added value, but the true cost.

A positive perspective came from Greece, delivered by Grigoris CHATZIKOSTAS, VP for Business Development, FoodScale Hub. *“We’ve observed some very positive aspects in the Greek ecosystem, for example, the first exit of a start-up company based on AI technologies in Greece.”* Digitalisation does not happen in a vacuum, and two key suggestions are: 1) that those in the ecosystem should understand that policymaking takes time and requires consensus, and take part in the process even if it seems cumbersome. 2) all players need to exercise empathy towards the perspectives of others.

The final panellist to speak was Ornella COSOMATI, Director Sustainability Policy, Microsoft. The company has been looking at

how AI can be used for sustainability, she said. No sector can decarbonize without high-quality data and measurements. Microsoft’s mission is to build tools that can help individuals, organisations, and farmers. She mentioned Terrain AI, a modelling platform to be used in decision making, and being developed with European universities. It is currently being piloted by the Irish Government and food processors. More and more tools are being developed for science-based policymaking. What is vital is that there is equal access to tools for the entire value chain.

Wrapping up, Moderator Antoine OGER, Research Director, IEEP, reiterated how important it is to have the conversation about the role of policy to achieve an inclusive, sustainable and resilient digital future for agriculture.

SESSION 2:

Out in the digital fields: opportunities, challenges and knowledge gaps

Looking away from policy and on to the land, Jurgen TACK opened the second session by turning to the opportunities, challenges and realities on farms.

Kaili JUPPETS, Procurement Agro Potato Director for PepsiCo Europe, shared a first-hand perspective on some of company’s advances under its commitment to *“positive agriculture”*. Accurate, complete, timely and robust data is vital to measure progress, she said. One of the company’s tools is I-crop, which provides a robust data set and an analytics dashboard. For example, it serves as an irrigation scheduling tool, matching irrigation to the needs of the crop. Another is a machine learning tool designed to optimize yields.

Also in the field is a new type of ultra-precise, smart spot sprayer to combat weeds, coming from Ecorobotix. With 100 of the ARA sprayers already in use in Europe, some farmers have been able to reduce herbicide use by up to 95%, compared to a single sprayer, said Steve TANNER, CTO and Co-Founder, Ecorobotix. He described how the machine allows synthetic chemistry to be replaced with non-selective, simpler molecules, which degrade better.

Fusing together many, many data points and providing insights for better land management is the rationale for Downforce Technologies’ platform. The tool is designed to support land managers on the ground, said Beth DOOLEY, Head of Partnerships, by using both historical data and data from satellites and remote sensing. The goal is to

understand what happens when land interventions are made, from carbon sequestration to biodiversity assessments.

Leaving Europe for a moment, how can AI benefit developing countries? Dr. Keisuke KATSURA, Associate Professor, Tokyo University of Agriculture and Technology, and his team have been investigating the question, mostly in West African countries. Gathering accurate data about productivity and estimating yields is very different and more difficult than in Europe. Why? Farmers have very small fields, unsuitable for satellite remote sensing; there is large variation in area and growth, high harvest losses and difficulties in product traceability. Despite that, the Tokyo team has developed an app now being put into use in a number of African countries. They use image estimation technology, based on smartphone images, and image analysis technology based on deep learning.

Respondents and closing

Petros KOKKALIS highlighted that there is no standardized European system for gathering statistics – and all players need to go into rural areas, start-up villages and hubs to work on this. *“The big thing for the next Parliament would be to design the upcoming regional policy, cohesion policy instrument, and the new CAP in a way that talks into consideration the goals of the Green Deal, not only the climate goals, but also the toxicity goals, the pollution goals and so on.”*

Tassos HANIOTIS said that digitalisation and AI are not about substituting human activity but complementing it. There is too much data, and it needs to be prioritized, harmonized and used to tell stories about how the sector can sustainably increase productivity. At the political level, Europe needs to avoid *“slogans and polarization”* and take a systems and holistic approach. And economic models need to incorporate not only environmental aspects but also prices. His final point was about soil: *“our priority should be on soil, because if you do good things for soil, you do good things for air, water and biodiversity”*.

Watch the sessions on our videos page and read the report *Artificial intelligence in the agri-food sector – applications, risks and impact* by Josse De BAERDEMAEKER. www.forumforag.com



Friends of the Countryside Study Tour to the heart of France



Friends of the Countryside (FCS) members Daniel and Mary-Ange HURSTEL hosted and warmly welcomed a group of 30 Friends including Jurgen TACK, Secretary General of ELO, for the 4th FCS Study Tour to their estate Chateau Saint Marcel de Felines in Loire, France the last weekend of September. Study Tours are an opportunity for members to explore matters of interest in more depth The HURSTEL organised a varied, compelling and relevant programme with visits that included not only the owners but professionals who were linked to the estate.

Sophy SMITS VAN OYEN – MALTZOFF, FCS

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Visits began to the bucolic Charolais Brionnais region to visit a cattle market where director Guillaume BERGER showed members where the massive Charolais Brionnais cattle are auctioned off every Wednesday. Friends then visited a cattle farm with the specific label of 'Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée (A.O.C) : Bœuf de Charolles' where cattle have to meet precise standards of raising to be awarded this label. This region is also known for its bucolic 'bocage' or hedged landscape where cattle are moved from field to field every few weeks to savour the varied grasses and herbs. The area is a candidate for UNESCO heritage.

Friends were then greeted by Anne DE LAGUICHE, owner of Chateau de Chaumont (owned by the de La GUICHE family since 1465) and of the remarkable 17th century stables. It is capable of holding 99 horses (only the king was allowed to hold 100 horses in a stable!) and was built by Francois BLONDEL who was inspired by Leonardo da Vinci. The estate includes a

vast evergreen forest.

The owner of 18th century Chateau de Digoine, Jean-Louis REMILLEUX, bought the chateau empty 10 years ago and has since furnished it and restored the library nestled in the Medieval tower as well as the 19th century theatre. On the 35 hectare estate, he has planted a rose garden comprising over 2000 ancient roses and 60 different varieties, restored the orangery, kitchen garden and greenhouse, an English garden with a large lake. Jean Louis REMILLEUX is the well-known producer of the popular 'Secrets d'Histoires' series.

Friends were given first-hand accounts of the Saint Marcel estate by architect Jean Francois GRANGE CHAVANAIS Landscape historian Frederic SICHET, who also works at Vaux le Vicomte and Chantilly, then took members around the extensive walled gardens where massive biodynamic improvements were made including the development of a richer and endogenous fauna and flora, restoration of wetlands, a box

hedge garden, a 90m canal warmed and fed by irrigation streams, kitchen garden, orchard and more. Félines jumping horses are bred on the estate.

The Study group also visited the newly transformed wine production at the historic Chateau de La Chaize, the largest of the Beaujolais estates, where state of the art vineyard technology meets traditional buildings. The group was welcomed by the renowned and charming Didier REPELLIN, "architecte en chef de monuments historiques émérite", who planned not only the restoration of the chateau but also the newly built cellar using the latest technology such as geo-thermal heating, to build a modern cellar made with special concrete and invisible from above. The other 18th century historic cellar is, at 108 metres, one of the longest in France. The vineyards are maintained by robots - except for the 2 special 'Clos' vineyards - Clos de la Chapelle des Bois and Clos La Chaize - which are maintained using traditional methods only.



The estate was founded in 1676, as a vineyard estate designed by renowned architect Jules HARDOUIN-MANSART with gardens designed by Le NÔTRE, and had been the family home of the Chaize d'Aix for nearly 350 years. In 2017, it was bought by the GRUY family, who are dedicated to environmentally-friendly practices, including organic viticulture, waste reduction, and electric-powered machinery to minimise carbon emissions. The group had the hon-

our of visiting the chateau with the owner Christophe GRUY, a successful businessman who sees the importance of defending private ownership.

Philippe and Cecile DE LA BROSSE greeted members at Chateau de Rochefort, a historic estate dating back to 1460. In 2009, the castle was designated as a historical monument, encompassing various elements such as the castle itself, its en-

trance pavilion, the two castle terraces, moats, and the bridge connecting it to the formal garden.

As FCS Board Member Jack TENISON so rightly said in his speech, we thank first and foremost our kind and generous hosts Daniel and Mary-Ange HURSTEL for organising such an intriguing and interesting programme, also all those who so kindly hosted and accompanied us.



ELO General Assembly in Belgium

Over 50 people, representing 20 European countries, attended the ELO General Assembly held in Brussels in the last days of November. The event was organized with the support of our Belgian member organizations: *Landelijk Vlaanderen*, *NTF-Propriétaires ruraux de la Wallonie* and *Société Royale Forestière de Belgique*, who helped define the framework for the future Belgian presidency of the Council of the European Union from January 1.

Particular attention was paid to the difficult negotiations on certain "Green Deal" proposals, notably those linked to the "Farm to Fork" and "Biodiversity" strategies. Martin HLAVACEK MEP (Renew, CZ) emphasized this point, and also addressed the state of progress of the framework report on carbon phase-out that he was leading.

The next AGM will take place from May 13 to 15 in Hungary.

The ELO secretariat takes this opportunity to warmly thank its Belgian members for their continued support throughout the year.



©Belgian Presidency

Priorities of the Belgian Presidency

Belgium holds the Presidency of the Council of the European Union for the first half of 2024, from January 1 to June 30. The six priorities of the Belgian Presidency for this six-month period are :

- Defending the rule of law, democracy and unity
- Strengthen our competitiveness
- Pursue a fair and green transition
- Strengthening our social and health agenda
- Protecting people and borders
- Promoting a global Europe

Life European Networks for private land conservation (LIFE ENPLC)



Meet Jean-Philippe Tamarelle, our dedicated ENPLC Ambassador!

He is a nature lover and owns a forest estate of 95ha included a 11ha peat bog of European interest in terms of biodiversity, the Bois Ginette, in Seine-Maritime department in France.

Supported by the departmental federation of hunter of Seine-Maritime (FDC 76), Jean-Philippe is making a real impact by restoring the land and monitoring fauna/flora in the bog.

The bog's management is guided by a committee with partners like the French Office of Biodiversity, Conservatory of Natural Areas of Normandie, and the "Pôle d'équilibre territorial et rural du Pays de Bray."

Dive into the full interview with Jean-Philippe Tamarelle, you'll learn more about his inspiring conservation efforts on ENPLC website.

pastures, ponds, and streams, where it is easy to come across traces of wolves, wild boars, and foxes.

Many species of migratory birds, such as hoopoes, are also present in this area, which is rich in pollinators, amphibians, and reptiles.

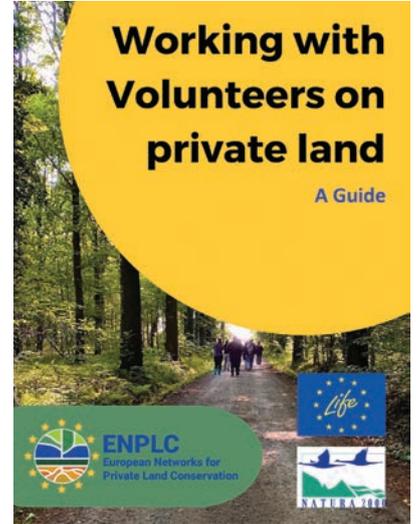
[Read more on ENPLC website](#)



The best keeper of nature is the private forest owner themselves

Approximately a hundred forest owners and individuals connected to forestry convened at a conference arranged by the Estonian Private Forestry Union (EEML) in Estonia in November 2023. Their central query revolved around the optimal approach to nature conservation: should it remain under strict governmental regulations and mandates, or could it be more effectively managed by private entities?

[Read more on ENPLC website](#)



Discover all our reports

Working with volunteers on private land

In June 2023, NABU hosted a groundbreaking international workshop in Berlin, Germany, shedding light on the immense potential of conservation easements in Europe!

Conservation easements are a powerful tool for preserving our environment, and this workshop was a crucial step in understanding how we can enhance

[Check out the workshop findings on ENPLC website](#)

- @LIFE_ENPLC
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- @life-enplc T
- www.enplc.eu

NEWS



Artis Umbria, a beautiful private area in the Umbrian hills

Artis Umbria is surrounded by 88 hectares of oak forests at an altitude of 600 meters. There are unique environments with

The LIFE ENPLC project brings together **18 organizations** from 11 European countries: Belgium, Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Portugal, Romania, Spain and the Netherlands.



The project European Networks for Private Land Conservation (LIFE19 PRE/NL/000003) receives funding from the LIFE Programme of the European Union.

Europe's Journey Towards Climate Neutrality: the Chemical Industry and the ChemSkills Project

Europe has emerged as a leader in the pursuit of climate neutrality, setting ambitious goals that entail the transformation of all industries to contribute to the continent's collective effort. One of the key sectors undergoing substantial change is the chemical industry. This transformation isn't just about transitioning to a greener approach but also involves digital advancements and the development of necessary skills for employees within this field.

Daniel BENEDIKT and Dagmar DOLEJSI, ELO



ChemSkills
Enabling the green and digital skills transformation of the chemical industry.



Europe's Drive Towards Climate Neutrality

The European Union has committed to becoming climate-neutral by 2050, intending to drastically reduce greenhouse gas emissions and balance them out through carbon removal methods. Achieving this goal necessitates substantial changes across various industries, and the chemical sector plays a pivotal role in this journey.

The ChemSkills Project: Bridging Skills for a Sustainable Future

At the forefront of this industry's transformation lies the ChemSkills project. Its primary objective is to equip professionals in the chemical sector with essential skills and knowledge to effectively adapt to these transformative changes. Here's an overview of what the ChemSkills project encompasses:

ChemSkills is designed to foster skills and analyze future needs for educational training for all levels of education, including retraining and upskilling the existing workforce. The initiative is focusing on professional education, learning, and enhancing employee qualifications.

Moreover, the project addresses the current quadruple transformation ongoing in the chemical industry, covering green and digi-

tal transitions and circularity.

The areas addressed by the project are:

- Plastics
- Consumer chemicals
- **Fertilisers**
- Rubber
- Pharmaceuticals
- Petrochemicals

Funded by the ERASMUS+ program, ChemSkills is an ambitious venture involving 33 partners and 2 associated partners from various European countries. To see all partners visit project website. Commencing on September 1, 2023, the project is set to span over four years.

Fertilizers subsector

European Landowners' Organisation is subsector leader for Fertilizers area.

Fertilizers subsector is dedicated to addressing the skills needs and challenges associated with fertilizers and their usage in Europe. Within this subsector, there are specific challenges such as environmental concerns, sustainability, efficiency, and effects on soil fertility, all of which ELO and partners aims to tackle through various activities:

1. Identifying current and future needs within the fertilizers sector, focusing on

skills, trends, and job roles, including the role of digitalization and sustainability.

2. Compiling current and future training offerings, exploring innovative methods like online and potentially virtual/augmented reality training programs.
3. Defining new occupational profiles specific to the fertilizers subsector.
4. Analyzing issues, gaps, and providing recommendations for bridging these research gaps.
5. Establishing a skills agenda with clear strategies and a roadmap for future activities.

Together with our partners, ELO is currently doing the desk research and survey design phase across the entire supply and value chain together with the supporting markets. The WP7 partners are the Agriculture Association of the Czech Republic (AACR), the Association for Innovative Farming (AIF), Agriland Nord. ELO represents the position of WP leader.

Kick-off Meeting

The ChemSkills kick-off meeting held from September 13 to 15 in Brussels, Belgium. Emilia Venot from the European Commission highlighted the project's significance and encouraged collective dedication to its success.

The project, while challenging due to its scope and importance for the chemical sector, is poised to make substantial strides over the next four years.

This project symbolizes ELO's and Europe's commitment to sustainability and demonstrates a collective effort towards achieving climate neutrality across industries. The ChemSkills initiative is a cornerstone in fostering a skilled workforce capable of navigating and thriving in a rapidly transforming chemical landscape.

For continued involvement in the project, follow us on Twitter or LinkedIn or visit our website <https://chemskills.eu>



Taxation of Agricultural Land in Europe: A Comparative Approach

Autours: Guillaume SAINTENY (CS FRB), Louise DUPUIS (FRB)

Although European agriculture is subject to a number of harmonisation processes, the rules governing the taxation of agricultural land seem to differ considerably from one country to another. Taxation of agricultural land therefore has multiple effects, both on the agricultural land itself and on agricultural, land use, town planning and environmental policies.

For all these reasons, the "Fondation pour la recherche sur la biodiversité" felt that a comparative analysis of farmland taxation in Europe would be useful.

The study is now available in English and French.

2024 FAMIGRO An Award for Rural Entrepreneurship



The GROTENFELT family represents more than 350 years of diversified landowning in Finland. Famigro was founded by Karl GROTENFELT in 1985, a private company belonging to the family. In 2013, Karl created the Famigro Award, which is granted annually to a young (18 to 40) European countryside entrepreneur who is making a special contribution to the rural economy, community and environment. Thanks to the initiative of Karl GROTENFELT, each year the YFCS can support an innovative project that is at least 2 years in the running and provides answers to the current challenges of the rural sector.

Entrepreneurial projects contribute to the evolution of our rural countryside, while the respect of the environment and social responsibility is endorsed by each rural entrepreneur. The aim of the Famigro Award is to improve the project's success and growth by benefiting from the support of the network of the Friends of the Countryside (FCS) and Young Friends of the Countryside (YFCS), as well as the European Landowners' Organization (ELO).

The winner receives 5,000€, an article published in the Countryside Magazine and the opportunity to join the FCS & YFCS General Assembly in Siena, Italy in June 2024.

The 2024 edition opens November 30, and applications should be sent before February 1, 2024. The form is available on the ELO and YFCS sites, where all the details and conditions are specified.

Our applicants and winners in recent years come from a wide range of industries and countries who have achieved great innovations with their unique ideas. From an innovative bio based soil additive, to rebranding a family estate, to a Regenerative Farming community in Spain and more.

Previous winners include: Silvbio (www.silvbio.com), Gut Waltersteig (www.gut-waltersteig.de), La Junquera (<https://lajunquera.com/>) Coconat (<https://coconat-space.com/>), Coucoo (<https://www.coucoo.com/>), Wilderrest Tiny House (<https://wilderrest.be/build-your-tiny-house/>) and Wignac Cidre Naturel (<https://www.wignac.com/>).

For more information please contact: info@yfcs.eu

Let's increase our food supply
without
reducing theirs

the
good
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plan

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