

# CountrySide

European Landowners' Organization

N° 209

JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2024 - BIMONTHLY - EN



## Manifesto European Elections 2024

Managing Europe's land for the Future





# Editorial

Thierry de l'ESCAILLE, Executive President

## Contents

- 3 Manifesto European Elections 2024  
Managing Europe's land for the Future

---

- 7 Challenging times

---

- 8 Enhancing agricultural sustainability  
via trade policy

---

- 9 New Advisory Council appointed to support  
Forum's mission for agri-food system  
transformation

---

- 10 2024 Research lessons  
to inform future CAP reform

---

- 13 Imperial eagle returns to La Ronca (Spain)

---

- 14 EUWAY – final conference  
on water scarcity project

---

*The Ursula von der LEYEN European Commission is putting the “the cart before the horse” (the “Green Deal”) and by saying that, due to the present crisis, there had not been the time to take into account the remarks of those who were applying the Green Deal, is now affirming that it is absolutely essential to restore competitiveness.*

*Even if it is indeed urgent to finally take competitiveness into account, we can only conclude that the disaster we have been predicting is now at our doorstep. It is a Triple disaster: 1) company competitiveness is at half-mast, 2) environmental integration into the economy has been pushed aside to make way for a policy of silos, where, as soon as you try to green your methods, you are told to abide to environmental constraints. Without intelligent integration of these two aspects and the resulting social disaster, we are faced with the 3) the top-down approach of the promoters pressing for the great transformation of the economy is pushing the rural population onto the streets.*

*ELO is facing up to these realities and is proposing its Manifesto for the forthcoming elections. It is obvious that we should not reject everything that the Green Pact brings, but we must make it fair, balanced and therefore user-friendly. Failure to do so will lead to an explosive campaign and unexpected election results.*

*Ursula von der LEYEN is well aware of this, as witnessed by her thoughts on the future of agriculture. The worst thing that could happen would be to fight the wrong battle and lump together a whole series of causes that have little to do with the subject at hand. I see similar tensions developing in the world's other major entities, albeit with less acuity, as there is an observation effect with regard to what is being concocted in Europe. What we are witnessing is that the increasingly urban United Kingdom has embarked on just such a major change, which does not please the majority of operators either.*

*ELO wants to promote constructive thinking, in line with what it has always proposed: that the private sector is best placed for a sustainable economy that respects the balance between three pillars: economic, environmental and social. While tackling the pressing challenges facing our society, it is essential that policymakers engage with those they regulate when defining problems and proposing legislation. Hasty policies increase the risk of setbacks and erosion of trust, which is difficult to regain.*

*ELO welcomes efforts to strengthen dialogue and recognition of landowners and land managers as strategic partners in the green growth agenda.*

# Manifesto European Elections 2024

## Managing Europe's land for the Future

*This manifesto outlines our priorities ahead of the European elections, urging policymakers to recognize the central role of landowners in shaping a prosperous and harmonious future for Europe.*



**ELO calls on the EU to face Climate Change by:**

### 1 Reviving EU's agenda on Green growth and decarbonisation

ELO supports the aim to reach climate neutrality by 2050. Focusing on replacing fossil fuels and substituting carbon intensive materials is the best way to decarbonise the economy. This means focusing on the products that are renewable, processes that are more circular, thus promoting a sustainable bioeconomy. It also means acknowledging land pressures, and having policies that foster multifunctionality. This can lead to an EU that is more efficient, effective and sustainable.

### 2 Supporting proactive land-based action for climate change adaptation

Agriculture and forestry are among the sectors most directly affected by climate and, therefore, exposed to climate change. A reactive response is not enough for the challenges that climate change is and will present, like extreme weather events, wildfires, pests and diseases, flooding and water scarcity, productivity variations, and ecosystem changes. It requires proactive and flexible actions that may contradict assumptions, such as how to deal with alien species.

### 3 Supporting a market-based reward system for carbon removals

Land based sectors play a pivotal role in meeting the ambitious 2030 target of 310 million CO<sub>2</sub> eq carbon removals. This target must be accompanied by the proper market signals. ELO is dedicated to supporting methodologies that minimise the administrative burden for land managers, recognise pioneers, accurately calculate baselines, and address permanence in a realistic manner. Those methodologies should also consider the specific activities and environmental conditions of each region. The sooner the framework allows for a boost in the market of carbon removals, the sooner the targets can be met.



**ELO calls on the EU to push a strategic autonomy agenda that includes land-based sectors by:**

### 1 Not jeopardising food security

Already wedged between highly concentrated upstream input suppliers and the almost-as-concentrated buyers of agricultural produce, EU farmers and land managers face increasing difficulties due to climate change and geopolitical uncertainties. These circumstances lead to sub-optimal investments in agriculture, which should be dealt with strategically. Improvements in sustainable food production are also necessary to keep our leading position in agri-food trade. This leadership is key not only for food security, but also as a precondition to sustain our position of influence to push a sustainability agenda.

### 2 Recognising the potential of land-based sector in ending the EU's energy dependence

In a context of energy uncertainty and instability, the EU must support the development of its own energy resources for local consumption. Land-based sectors have the capacity to provide such energy, and therefore support the EU's energy independence. This includes bioenergy, as well as solar and wind. There is a great potential in the multifunctional usage of agricultural areas in which food production, nature and energy production can co-exist.

### 3 Recognising the EU's multifunctional forestry sector

European forests are managed to provide multiple and interdependent functions. Sustainable Forest Management is a complex concept aiming at reaching a balance of forest functions, including delivering and supporting different ecosystem services. The diversity of forests in the EU make it a necessity to rely on the national structures and forest owners expertise. Forest owners should be supported in their efforts to minimise the negative impacts of climate change in forest ecosystems, which have a slower adaptation capacity, thus guaranteeing the resilience of forests and the sector.



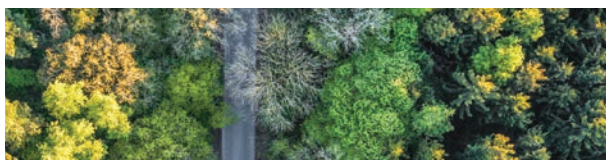
**ELO calls on the EU to push a strategic autonomy agenda that includes land-based sectors by:**

4

#### **Keeping pace with agri technology and innovation**

Our vision is to advance sustainable farming practices, ensuring a resilient and competitive agricultural sector for the future. ELO urges EU policy makers to prioritise swift implementation of the regulation on new breeding techniques (NGTs). We advocate for safer and environmentally sustainable alternatives to support disease-resistant and climate-resilient crops. Emphasising the importance of research and authorisation, we call for concerted efforts to make these products available to farmers as soon as possible.

Biocontrol agents (such as predators, parasitoids, micro organisms, and peptides) are generally considered to be less toxic and more sustainable than chemical pesticides, and they are meeting the broader societal aspiration to have more natural solutions. The uptake of biocontrol in the EU has been slow, and there are several challenges to be addressed, such as regulatory barriers or knowledge gaps. Policy makers must address these challenges and support the adoption of increased innovation of natural solutions in crop protection, by adapting the current EU regulatory and policy framework.



**ELO calls on the EU to push a strategic autonomy agenda that includes land-based sectors by:**

1

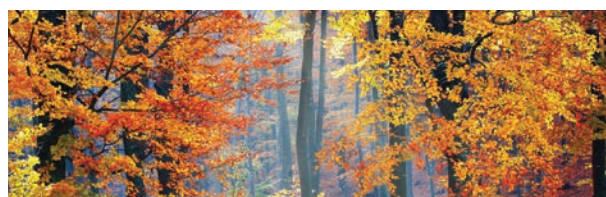
#### **Managing Europe's ecosystems for the future**

Climate change is impacting the European ecosystems and its biodiversity to a degree we still do not fully understand. However, we do understand that important decisions have to be made today. We are aware that, in face of the multiple crises, there is the temptation to prioritise short-term gains at the expense of sustainable solutions. A long-term approach is however of crucial importance to cope with the ever more regular extreme changes we will face. We need to look beyond protection and restoration. Instead, we should provide the tools and means to land managers who can help ecosystems to thrive and provide the services society needs.

#### **Recognising that multiple farming, forest and landscape systems need to coexist**

2

ELO underscores the imperative need to recognise that sustainability transcends any singular method of production. European land managers face an array of challenges, with climate change taking a prominent place among them. Our land-based sector must also respond to political and societal pressures to curtail the use of mineral fertilisers and synthetic pesticides, lower nitrogen emissions, provide ecosystem services, restore natural habitats, and ensure affordable production of food and raw materials. This multifaceted landscape needs a holistic approach, where all these challenges are addressed simultaneously.



**ELO calls on the EU to boost proactive action on the environment by:**

3

#### **Focusing on the incentives for nature restoration and other biodiversity targets**

The current strategy to protect nature and halt biodiversity loss is mainly based on prohibition and not enough on incentives. We need to shift from a prescriptive-based strategy to a system that puts into operation a variety of nature-based solutions. The knowledge accumulated from science and field should result in a real difference on the ground. We raise concerns over the increasing pressures put on land, in particular with more expected to be set aside for nature, disregarding the implications. The Nature Restoration Law in particular, but also the increased network of protected and strictly protected areas, have to be balanced with their multifactorial implications. Pursuing environmental protection without taking into account economic viability and social equity, will lead to disappointing results.

4

#### **Promoting private conservation**

Private landowners and managers must be at the core of political decisions and subsequent actions for protecting the environment. When landowners and land managers provide public goods, they do so with the expert knowledge, the effective methods, and in the cheapest way possible. Offering them support and incentives, such as tax breaks or conservation easements, encourages them to actively contribute to the conservation targets. Private landowners should be given flexibility in implementing EU regulations to ensure the feasibility of environmental protection and sustainability targets on their land. In that sense, they should be provided with an array of existing support mechanisms, including financial resources and training.



JOHN DEERE

NOTHING RUNS LIKE A DEERE



JOHN DEERE  
OPERATIONS CENTER™



TECHNOLOGY-DRIVEN

SUSTAINABLE FARMING



Home



Map

Settings

# FARM SMART, PROFIT MORE

Step into the future of sustainable farming with our comprehensive portfolio of precision agriculture products for effective site-specific farming. You'll quickly make smarter decisions based on actual data to efficiently optimize your use of resources, improve soil health, and reduce chemical runoff while you boost yields. Talk to our dealer experts now about how to get started!



DISCOVER WHAT  
JOHN DEERE  
PRECISION AG  
TECHNOLOGY CAN  
DO FOR YOU



**ELO calls on the EU to boost proactive action on the environment by:**

## 5 Promoting initiatives on soil health

Soil health is essential to secure our ability to produce food and maintain stable ecosystems. ELO is closely following the proposal for a Soil Monitoring Law and welcomes the focus on all soils and the importance of improving soil data. Knowledge is essential to develop well-designed and cost-effective resilience tools and mechanisms to support land managers. We advocate a step-by-step approach, using the evaluation of the directive after the initial health assessment to then develop better resilience proposals, together with those being asked to implement them.

## 8 Managing Water

Water availability issues are not being addressed adequately, particularly at a time where floods and droughts are such a common occurrence.

Climate change is adding to the difficulties of managing water resources, mostly by making it more difficult to predict the frequency and magnitude of both floods and droughts. This poses difficulties to all sectors, with agriculture and ecological impacts being dismissed when problems are most severe. More needs to be done on water efficiency and the availability of reservoirs, but also on the waste of “wastewater”. ELO welcomes the plan to focus on a water resilience initiative that involves land managers and listens to their concerns.



**ELO calls on the EU to boost proactive action on the environment by:**

## 1 Supporting a strong CAP that remains the best tool for land managers

The Common Agricultural Policy is vital in guaranteeing a competitive agricultural sector, contributing to Sustainable Forest Management and in supporting rural areas. It is not an easy task in face of budget pressures and increasingly challenging circumstances. Agriculture is the main sector under the responsibility

of the EU, it requires policy-makers to take their responsibility seriously. While the new reform is still in the initial phases of implementation, it is important to follow its development and track the delivery of its numerous strategic objectives, while allowing for corrections and innovation.

## 2 Considering the specificities and needs of rural businesses

There are many different types and structures of rural businesses. The fundamental conditions for these to thrive are secure private property rights and intergenerational management. Due consideration must be given to the various scales, legal structures, and management practices of these businesses at the European level. Viable farms, forests and rural businesses need to be at the heart of the European rural economy, whatever their business structure, scale or speciality.

## 3 Future-proofing our rural areas

Rural areas often face extra pressures, due to economies of scale, infrastructure needs, and climatic pressures on land-based sectors. The risk of desertification is particularly acute in some rural areas, where the once typical mosaic and diversified landscape structures have been replaced by unmanaged areas of forests and shrubs, prone to wildfires and subsequent desertification. This extreme example showcases the importance of maintaining vitality in rural areas.



**ELO calls on the EU to act for prosperous rural businesses by:**

## 4 Securing platforms for dialogue

While addressing the urgent challenges in our society, it is crucial for policymakers to engage with those they regulate when defining problems and proposing legislation. Rushing policies raises the risk of setbacks and the erosion of trust, which is challenging to regain.

ELO welcomes efforts to increase dialogue and the recognition of landowners and land managers as strategic partners for the green growth agenda.

While maintaining a focus on long-term objectives, it's imperative to effectively manage and resolve daily issues as they emerge. Conflicts between large carnivores and humans are increasing and platforms for discussion should be encouraged. ELO stays committed as co-chair of the EU Platform for coexistence to promote dialogue and raise the voice of the rural community.

With this in mind, it is important that the European Parlia-

ment's Intergroup "Biodiversity, Hunting, Countryside" is renewed for the 2024-2029 parliamentary term, as it is an essential vector of dialogue between the European Parliament and rural stakeholders.

**More information on the European Parliament's Intergroup "Biodiversity, Hunting, Countryside" and the Large Carnivores Platform can be found on the ELO website.**



**ELO calls on the EU to boost digitalisation that supports land managers by:**

## 1 Using data to boost innovation

Better data and knowledge are vital. The application of digital technologies through machinery, monitoring tools, data-driven field analysis and other tools are highly promising when it comes to delivering reduced resource use, increased farm profitability, and environmental gains.

Satellites and Artificial Intelligence are changing the way we look at problems and solutions. However, there is a risk that regulation will always run behind the pace of change. This makes it essential to involve the different stakeholders when designing new tools, particularly those that are imposed by regulators. It is important to change the current mindset from centralised monitoring of policies to specific management supporting tools.

## 2 Ensuring privacy of rural business data

ELO remains concerned over privacy and data protection aspects. While we are supportive of the development and use of digitalisation tools, particularly with the increased use of satellites, it is important that data shared is limited to an aggregated format and the process of collection, storage and handling are transparent and include correction mechanisms.

Data gathered as part of digital farming belongs to the farmer and is part of his or her property. Any distribution of this data or use by third parties must be clearly agreed upon by contract before any data sharing is permitted. The use of digital tools as part of the CAP farm checks is encouraged but should be held to the same privacy standards. As tools advance more attention needs to be paid to its potential setbacks.

# Challenging times

Dr Jurgen TACK, ELO Secretary General

We are living in challenging times, where intelligent leadership is needed more than ever. 2024 is a pivotal year for Europe to elect its future leaders, whose decisions will significantly impact our well-being. Political commitment to property rights has been proven to have a direct positive impact on economic growth. Economic growth, in turn, forms the foundation for the willingness to address environmental issues. As ambassadors for rural entrepreneurs in Europe, the European Landowners' Organization plays a pivotal role in developing policies related to economic, social, and ecological development.

ELO recognises the need to reach climate neutrality by 2050. However, this can only be done by supporting proactive land-based action for climate change adaptation and by supporting a market-based reward system for carbon removals.

ELO calls on the EU to recognize the potential of land-based sector in ending the EU's energy dependence, and by recognising the EU's multifunctional forestry sector.

The EU should push a strategic autonomy agenda that includes land-based sectors by keeping pace with technology and innovation in forestry and agriculture.

The ELO is aware of the challenge to manage Europe's ecosystems for the future. However, it should be recognized that multiple farming, forest, and landscape systems need to coexist. To reach biodiversity targets there is an urgent need to promote and support private land conservation.

The ELO asks the EU to act for prosperous rural business by supporting a strong CAP that remains the best tool for land managers, while considering the specificities and needs of rural businesses and future-proofing our rural areas.

Data is becoming an increasingly important aspect of daily life, also in the countryside. ELO remains concerned over privacy and data protection aspects. Data gathered as part of digital farming belongs to the farmer and is part of his or her property. Any distribution of this data or use by third parties must be clearly agreed upon by contract before any data sharing is permitted.

While addressing the urgent challenges in our society, it is crucial for policymakers to engage with those they regulate when defining problems and proposing legislation. Rushing policies raises the risk of setbacks and the erosion of trust, which is challenging to regain. ELO therefore asks the EU to increase dialogue and the recognition of landowners and land managers as strategic partners for the green growth agenda.

If you want to know more about ELO's demands to the next European Commission, have a look at our Manifesto European Elections 2024: "Managing Europe's land for the Future".

# Enhancing agricultural sustainability via trade policy



*Are trade policy and agricultural sustainability on a collision course?  
Or can new forms of trade policy enhance global sustainability by directing local priorities?*



Achieving sustainability in global agri-food systems is an increasingly urgent issue, yet sustainability cannot be approached with a one-size-fits-all mindset. The growing prevalence of sustainability measures by countries worldwide could lead to unintended consequences for agricultural trade, productivity, and profitability, as well as for rural communities, and the climate.

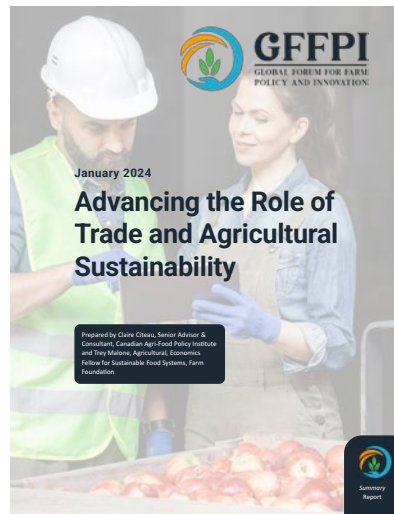
A new report from the Global Forum on Farm Policy & Innovation (GFFPI) identifies challenges and areas of opportunity in ways trade and agricultural sustainability can work together. Entitled *Advancing the Role of Trade and Agricultural Sustainability*, the report is based on the inaugural public-private workshop led by GFFPI in October 2023 at the OECD, with the support of Australia, the Netherlands and Japan.

The workshop brought together representatives from the OECD Member States and Secretariat, the agri-food industry, thought leaders and subject matter experts from across Europe, North America, Japan and Australia late last year to unpack the role of trade in enhancing agricultural sustainability.

More than 80 participants engaged in dynamic discussions on actionable solutions, including creating a global platform for knowledge exchange, integrating an outcomes-based approach in trade policy, and developing shared indicators to measure progress. The workshop also emphasized the importance of data and transparency and the need for collaboration between governments and the private sector globally.

Key points identified in the report include:

- Enhancing food systems and trade through outcomes-based approaches to sustainability,
- Intensifying global cooperation in support of coherent policies and a global framework for sustainable agriculture,
- Optimizing trade to make agriculture



sustainable and profitable, and

- Harnessing data and technology to transform the way we grow and trade food.

GFFPI representatives were impressed by the depth of insight and analysis workshop attendees brought to the topic.

*"While trade agreements cannot dictate national policy choices, they can help achieve national objectives while respecting local perspectives,"* said Tyler MCCANN, Managing Director of the Canadian Agri-Food Policy Institute. *"There was a strong sentiment in the room that outcomes-based approaches encourage innovation, while prescriptive, unilateral ones can hinder progress and stymie market access."*

With their sentiments captured in the post-event report, participants highlighted the need at an international level to ensure that trade is based on a shared vision and understanding of comprehensive sustainable food systems.

Global standards and guidelines can provide the means by which countries improve sustainability in a way that avoids trade distortions and protectionism, said Katie

MCCROBERT, General Manager of the Australian Farm Institute. *"There was strong support at the workshop to reach consistency on those shared sustainability values which will help us work cooperatively on better outcomes for agri-food systems around the world,"* Ms. MCCROBERT said.

Mark TITTERINGTON, Co-Founder and Director of the Forum for the Future of Agriculture, said there are two ways to think about sustainability and trade: how can trade support sustainable agriculture; and how can policies aimed at sustainability facilitate trade? *"With farm incomes being squeezed and farmers and land managers being impacted by the effects of a changing climate and the loss of biodiversity, we increasingly need to think and act in favour of systemic change to build a more resilient, sustainable, and climate smart agri-food system. Trade is a key dimension of this, and we must ask how we ensure that trade policy can act as a driver of agriculture sustainability. This first workshop provoked a number of key insights and takeaways, as well as identifying questions for further exploration, and we were delighted to have worked with our global partners to orchestrate a unique discussion on this topic with such a diverse range of stakeholders"*.

Shari ROGGE-FIDLER, CEO of Farm Foundation said farmers and ranchers play a critical role in sustainability and climate solutions. *"We need to ensure that the policy environment enables rather than overly burdens them in this role and that we have trade policies for market support,"* Ms ROGGE-FIDLER said.

**This workshop was the first of a series of events planned for 2024 and beyond to foster ideas and bring about convergence on a path forward.**

**You can read and download the full report on [www.forumforag.com](http://www.forumforag.com)**



# New Advisory Council appointed to support Forum's mission for agri-food system transformation

*Forum for the Future of Agriculture announced in February the establishment of a new Advisory Council to support it in the achievement of its mission to help build a more resilient, sustainable, climate smart and nature positive food and agriculture system.*



The Council will be comprised of leading stakeholders with a broad range of expertise and experience on sustainability issues in the agri-food system. In particular, they will provide an independent, external expertise for the Forum's Chairman and leadership to draw on in developing the overall strategy, maintaining existing and building new partnerships as well as helping to represent and amplify our work.

Members of the Advisory Council will serve an initial two-year term, in a personal capacity. The first members are:



*Tassos HANIOTIS, Senior Guest Research Scholar at the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis and former member of the European Commission.*

A long-serving senior official in the European Commission serving, most recently, as Director for Strategy, Simplification and Policy Analysis in the DG for Agriculture and Rural development. In addition to several other senior leadership roles in DG AGRI, Tassos notably served as Deputy Head of Cabinet for the former European Commissioner for Agriculture Franz FISCHLER, and as Agricultural Counsellor in the European Commission's Delegation in the US.

Tassos, a recent Fellow of the European Association of Agricultural Economists, holds Ph.D. and M.S. degrees in Agricultural Economics from the University of Georgia in the U.S., and a B.A. in Economics from the Athens University of Economics and Business in his native Greece. He was also a visiting Fellow at the Centre for European Agricultural Studies, Wye College, University of London, focusing on EU-US agricultural trade relations in the Uruguay Round of GATT negotiations before joining the European Commission.

Since his retirement from the European Commission, Mr. HANIOTIS has been a Senior

Guest Research Scholar at the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis.



*Geneviève PONS, Director General and Vice-President, Europe Jacques Delors*

Director-General and Vice-President, Europe Jacques Delors. Ms. Pons previously served in the Cabinet of Mr. Jacques Delors during his last mandates as President of the European Commission (EC) (1991-1995) focusing on climate and the environment. She is an Honorary Director of the European Commission where she held several management positions before becoming Director of the ILO's Legal Service in 2013, and Director of the WWF's European Office in 2015. From November 2017, she has headed Europe Jacques Delors, the latest in the family of think tanks carrying on Jacques Delors' European vision. She is a graduate from Sciences Po Paris, the Sorbonne, and ENA.

Geneviève PONS is considered by Politico as one of the most influential women in Brussels, notably in the field of environment. She is a member of the EU Mission: Restore our Ocean and Waters, chaired by Pascal Lamy. She is co-chair with Pascal LAMY of the Antarctica2020 coalition, which aims to protect vast marine areas around Antarctica. She is also a Knight of the Legion of Honour.



*Ann TUTWILER, Chair of the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition and former Director-General of Bioversity International*

Chair of the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition and a member of the board of

CABI. In addition, she is a Senior Fellow at Meridian Institute and Chair of the Advisory Council for the Food and Agriculture Benchmark at the World Benchmarking Alliance. Previously, Ann chaired the Water, Land and Ecosystems Research Program of the CGIAR as well as the Access to Seeds Foundation Supervisory Board.

Ann is also a former Director General of Bioversity International and served as Deputy Director General of the Food and Agriculture Organization in Rome, Italy. She was also an adviser to the U.S. Secretary for Agriculture, Tom VILSACK, where she worked to develop and implement Feed the Future, during the OBAMA Administration.

Commenting on the announcement, Janez POTOČNIK, Chairman of the Forum for the Future of Agriculture, said: "Everywhere we look, farm incomes are being squeezed and the effects of climate change, along with the loss of biodiversity, are being felt across our food and agriculture system. Farmers and land-managers are bearing much of the cost of these effects, which are challenging the viability of their businesses. Having committed the Forum to play its part tackling these challenges and driving change through our 'Call to Action', which we launched last March, we are strengthening our ability to deliver on our mission and commitments with the establishment of our new Advisory Council. I am delighted that these three highly respected leaders have agreed to join the Council and lend to us the benefit of their considerable experience and expertise. Transformation of the agri-food system has never been more urgent or important and I have no doubt that the step we have taken today will enable the Forum to maximise our impact as part of this effort".

**For more information:**  
[www.forumforag.com](http://www.forumforag.com)



## 2024 Research lessons to inform future CAP reform

Summary by Liz WILSON



10

### Policy design in challenging times – the role of analytical tools in the CAP policy debate

How can scientific evidence improve the CAP so that it better addresses the environment? With this pressing question, Gabriele SACCHETTINI, of the RISE Foundation, set the scene for the day's discussion.

The context for the debate came in the keynote address from Tassos HANIOTIS, Special Advisor for Sustainable Productivity at the Forum for the Future of Agriculture. He was frank: current debates about agriculture, the Green Deal, food security and climate change are extremely polarised. This polarisation is fuelling frustration, one of the flagship policies of the Green Deal has been abandoned, and every reference to agriculture is now negative. *"We have reached a level where debate is so polarised it is going to be a dark day whether we change*

*something, or we don't change anything,"* he stated. We have to put the debates back on track, to see what has to be done – but how do we reach this turning point?

One fundamental need is to revisit assumptions made and targets set in the past and produce a credible baseline. Another need is to discuss data – which would be one of the recurring topics of the day – data use, data privacy, accessibility, the overwhelming amount of data available, but also the lack of data. The agricultural world badly needs to prioritise the data that is useful, he said: with so much available, people do not know which to use. Food chain data is opaque and does not adequately explain price ups and downs. Collection of data has problems: environmental data is lacking, and is not harmonised. The use of data also has issues – for example, biophysical models need to take account of the economy,

and economic models need to take account of the environment.

And what story are we telling with data? For Mr HANIOTIS, the narrative should be about productivity, but he has seen a negative reaction to the word. *"There is huge potential to increase productivity sustainably... to reduce the cost of producing and to do it by improving the environment. This is where meetings like this one are important. There are examples out there...to demonstrate that this is feasible. Where we have failed badly is in communicating these examples and therefore the debate has been based on evidence instead of an exchange of slogans."*

The examples of what is feasible came next with presentations of the three projects in the Horizon AGRIMODELS cluster, BESTMAP, MIND STEP and AGRICORE. Each project was described in terms of goals,

methodology and outcomes, and policy recommendations were discussed later in the session.

### Behavioural, ecological and socio-economic tools for modelling agricultural policy – the BESTMAP project

Tomáš VÁCLAVÍK of Palacký University Olomouc, outlined the goal: develop a modelling framework to show how well agri-environmental schemes and policies have been adopted by farmers, and the impact on the landscape. The project used a mixed method approach combining interviews with farmers and data, developing models, and building five case studies. One big challenge was harmonising data. “Agri-environmental scheme” means different things in different countries, some countries have many schemes, some only a few, and there were other issues around data as mentioned by Mr HANIOTIS.

BESTMAP was a step-change, though, compared to traditional models which have ignored the complexity of farmers' decision making. “We tried to wear the farmer's hat and disentangle the motivation, the rationale that drives their decisions, and how their decisions affect the farmland,” Mr VÁCLAVÍK explained.

The project was structured to allow the team to look at different categories of farms and how they adopt agri-environmental schemes, and the adoption rate of various types of schemes. The outcome was a complex picture, but the researchers were able to draw a general conclusion: “Large farms, especially the ones focusing on general cropping and grazing livestock, are more likely to adopt agri-environmental practices than small farms. And they adopt a much wider range.” There was an important lesson about farmers' motivation – it is mainly economic, and environmental concerns are secondary. And what of the effect of such schemes on biodiversity and ecosystems? They do have an impact – but it is quite marginal, Mr VÁCLAVÍK concluded, often due to bureaucracy and inflexible, longer-term contracts.

### Modelling agricultural individual decision making – the MIND STEP Model Toolbox

The second project, MIND STEP, had a broader objective when compared to BESTMAP, said John HELMING, Senior Researcher at Wageningen Economic Research. The goal was to improve decision-making models, resulting in the MIND STEP toolbox – a set of tools that allows for better representation of the diversity of farms heterogeneity in modelling, interaction between farms, improved interfaces between data, and models at different scales. The objectives

were also to improve transparency of methods, sustainability, sustainable software development, model evaluation and policy evaluation.

The project was organised around different case studies, either focusing on different themes like agri-environmental schemes, greenhouse gas emissions, risk management and so on, or improving existing models. “My ultimate goal would be to improve consistency between the models at different scales,” Mr HELMING said. “What would the results from large-scale models mean for the individual farmer? This should help to improve policy design and also to improve prediction of policy impacts.”

One of the most important elements was the question of integrating and connecting data, and particularly trying to integrate biophysical data with economic data, as Mr HANIOTIS has mentioned. MIND STEP resulted in new data being generated – for example, socio-psychological factors that drive farmers' intentions and adoption – which could then be connected in to models.

The project included two benchmark scenarios, one on climate mitigation taxation scenarios, and another on the reduction of natural fertiliser use, which led to positive feedback from policy stakeholders, along with many questions about implementation and feasibility.

### AGRICORE, an agent-based support tool for the development of agricultural policies

As the third project in the cluster, AGRICORE complements the others by adopting an agent-based approach (ABM) where each farm is modelled as an autonomous decision-maker which individually assesses its own context and makes decisions based on its current situation and expectations. Lisa BALDI, of the University of Parma, highlighted the synergies, saying “We provide a tool where all of the information [from BESTMAP and MIND STEP] can eventually be reused and collected”.

She showcased the project's innovative modelling architecture and introduced one component platform, the Agricultural Research Data Index Tool (ARDIT), a powerful resource for identifying data sources.

The core of the project, though, is the development of a new generation of ABM tool, using advanced computational science and ICT. With this, agents – individual farm holders or farms – can trigger individual scenarios and use the results to make decisions for the long term. “The long-term objectives that the farmers have set are used as a boundary for a decision in

the short term, the yearly basis,” Ms BALDI explained. The project, run by a consortium of 10 diverse partners, is due to conclude in May 2024.

### From regional case studies to European policy recommendations

Now with an overview of the three projects that had gathered data and built models, the audience were asked to turn their attention to the next step. How to upscale from the BESTMAP case studies to a wider area of Europe – and how to use the project's findings to inform policy recommendations?

Presenting the session, James BULLOCK, from the UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, explained that the starting point is to understand how similar other parts of Europe are to the case study regions. This is done using data and a “distance metric”, a statistical measure of how different the other regions' characteristics are. The second step is to understand how the models can be transferred to other regions using meta models. “This gives us a way of knowing where we can transfer our models to,” said Mr BULLOCK.

Turning to European policy recommendations, or as he put it “policy thoughts”, he asked: “Why do we think agri-environmental schemes are currently insufficient to

**AGRILAND**

Exploitant et/ou coordinateur d'exploitations agricoles

**Belgique**  
support@agriland.farm  
☎ +32 (0)10 23 29 00

**France**  
support@agriland.farm  
☎ +33 (0)4 30 14 23 45

[www.agriland.be](http://www.agriland.be)

support biodiversity and ecosystem services in Europe?”

Some of the reasons he gave:

1. Farmers don't take up schemes because of too much bureaucratic effort in reporting; a lack of advice or confusing advice; lack of flexibility; and not enough financial incentive.
2. When they do take up agri-environmental schemes, they do not tend to place them where it is best for biodiversity or ecosystem services, but where they have less impact on productivity or the most economic benefit.
3. Some schemes have significant positive effects, but others are inconsistent.
4. A lack of monitoring and data hinders policy improvement.

On a positive note, the audience were given a large menu of possible solutions. First, better regional and national land use framework coordination. Better targeting of agri-environmental schemes to where impact is maximised, rather than just where farmers prefer to do them. Better use of models and data to identify the landscape impacts of local measures. Co-design, so schemes are better adapted to local environmental and farming conditions. Improving advice to farmers. Payment for public goods, rather than for just doing agri-environmental schemes. Better monitoring.

“Maybe we also need a better policy cycle to achieve these things,” said Mr Bullock. This would be more adaptive, agile and multi-scale than the current top-down, seven-year CAP renewal approach.

#### Panel discussion and dialogue

The output from the event will feed into the Forum for the Future of Agriculture Annual Meeting in March 2024. With this in mind Emmanuelle MIKOSZ, Deputy & Programme Director at the Forum, asked the six panellists to suggest how to integrate the tremendous amount of knowledge from the room into policy recommendations.

Ignacio PEREZ-DOMINGUEZ, of the European Commission Joint Research Centre, said that data-driven tools are important, along with bottom-up approaches and clearer communication to farmers. “We have to focus on the tools, on the policies that have an effect on the environment, but are also easy to convey and easy to monitor.”

Antonia LÜTTEKEN, from the Environmental Sustainability Unit at DG AGRI, highlighted that in the past, authorities at the national level have not taken all the opportunities presented by the CAP. “We need to really get the member states on board at the

policy level and discuss the opportunities.”

Tassos HANIOTIS brought up “time-pertinent issues” – first, the policy cycle, and second, the time it takes to see the results of agri-environmental measures. And before measures are implemented, it needs to be clear what will work or if there are issues ahead.

Elisabet NADEU, Senior Policy Analyst, CAP and Food, Institute for European Environmental Policy, felt that the failure of current agri-environmental schemes was being driven in part by issues with the current monitoring and evaluation framework, the choice of indicators, and lack of clear targets. “It's not just about the figures that we need to attain, it's about having an impact. But for that, we need to know where we are going.”

That said, she felt that there is now a more tailored approach to CAP which is overall positive. What could help drive improvements? Integrating the CAP with what is left of the Green Deal objectives; changes to governance, involving different kinds of authorities at different levels; and integrating environmental and climate authorities into the process so as to avoid setting unattainable objectives. The design of financing could be looked at as well.

On the question of indicators, Mr HANIOTIS brought up soil. “If we focused on soil organic matter, and what exactly we measure, we would be so much better off in focusing on a few indicators.”

Ana ROCHA, who is Director of EU's Agri & Forestry-Related Policies at the European Landowners' Organization, and also linked to her family's farm, came back to rewards for public goods and ecosystems services,

saying there is a lot of room for improvement. She felt the CAP reform does open a door to that.

Ms ROCHA also touched on data – specifically, data privacy and the idea that data should be more freely accessible to help drive bottom-up schemes and sharing of best practices. From the landowners' perspective, there was a need for control, and also to build trust around the many issues that are still “up in the air”, like who is gathering data, who is analysing, who is aggregating.

The last words came from Mr PEREZ-DOMINGUEZ, who said he would be provocative. “Going back to economic sustainability, price is very important, we have been looking at price for a long time. But maybe we centred too much on the economics and missed the environmental part. With food inflation, very high prices, farmers never made as much as in 2023. But there are other issues than agricultural income. Bureaucracy, an accumulation of policies that are indirectly affecting farmers...climate law, pesticides, animal welfare legislation. It is complicated and something we should debate and reflect on ourselves.”

Watch the full sessions and listen to our podcast with Guy ZIV of the University of Leeds discussing BESTMAP at [www.forumforag.com](http://www.forumforag.com)

For detailed information on the AGRIMODELS cluster and each of the projects, visit <https://agrimodels-cluster.eu/>

Let's increase our food supply  
without  
reducing theirs

the  
good  
growth  
plan

Syngenta Brussels Office  
Avenue Louise, 489,  
B-1050 Brussels  
Tel: +32.2.642 27 27  
[www.syngenta.com](http://www.syngenta.com)  
[www.goodgrowthplan.com](http://www.goodgrowthplan.com)

syngenta

# Imperial eagle returns to La Ronca (Spain)

*The Iberian Imperial Eagle population has gone through many vicissitudes and its population has been on the verge of collapse for the last 60 years. Today, breeding pairs are increasing every year, colonising both new and historic territories and the overall situation offers a vision that although is not without risks, it is certainly much more optimistic than it was a couple of decades ago.*

Dr. Carlos OTERO, WESC Chairman



Paraje Los Mirabeles, finca La Ronca: the meadow of centenary holm oaks is the hunting area of the imperial eagle.

The initiatives taken by private landowners since the 1970s have been exemplary, as well as extraordinarily generous and fundamental for the recovery of this species. The local, regional and national legal framework has of course been a necessary basis, the Directives issued in Brussels are also necessary, the support of the Administrations - most of the time moral - is also necessary, but the individual effort, combined with that of the private owners who have fought for the future of the Imperial eagle, has been, and this cannot be stressed enough, absolutely essential for the success of the species.

They have never asked for anything more than to be allowed to do what they do best, to manage nature wisely and to fight for the defence, conservation and promotion of a natural heritage that is unique in the world.

Wildlife Estates since 2003 has been able to take up this baton to contribute to the conservation and promotion of the breeding pairs of Imperial Eagle in its 74 territories in Spain.

It is therefore a privilege for the Estate of La Ronca, Escalona, Toledo, to announce the return of the species.

In 2017 this historic agricultural and shooting Estate created by the legendary and admired Italian gentleman Leo BIAGGI DE BLASYS in 1960, received the Wildlife Es-

tates accreditation and since then the estate, in a totally selfless manner, has been resolutely implementing the preservation of numerous endangered wildlife species by combining traditional uses, sustainable exploitation and conservation of wildlife species.

The search for and maintenance of the *Threshold of Tranquility* for these ecosystems of centuries-old *dehesas* and their forests bordering the river Alberche under protection of Natura 2000 and the promo-

tion of prey species such as Rabbits, Iberian hares, Red-legged partridges and Feral pigeons have resulted in the presence of numerous birds of prey and, of course, the return of the Iberian Imperial eagle to these areas.

Timidly at first with the sporadic presence of one or two young birds that stayed a few months hunting and roosting in La Ronca in 2019, until the continuous presence, week after week since 2021 of 3 young birds plus a breeding pair, which we trust that this coming season can settle definitively in one of the 3 or 4 most remote and sheltered areas of the Estate.

Our gratitude from these lines to the MARAZZI Family landowner of the property, to the support of Wildlife Estates and the Imperial Eagle Foundation and to the support of the Directorate General for the Environment of the European Commission, who from Brussels have closely followed the development of this experience and my most sincere recognition to the efficient work of the manager and game keepers of La Ronca, the true architects of this success, Paco, Andrés and Javi. Thanks, above all, to all three of them.

The promotion of prey species in La Ronca, together with the conservation of a high *Tranquillity Threshold*, are two key factors to explain the return of the Imperial Eagles.





## EUWAY – final conference on water scarcity project

*EUWAY, an EU-Funded Erasmus+ Project coordinated by the European Landowners' Organization, held its final conference on March 7th at the European Parliament in Brussels. This two-year project has been analysing water scarcity and developed training modules that to be used by young farmers (or farmers of all ages, who plan to remain in agriculture for the next 20-40 years).*

Daniel MONTELEONE, ELO

The conference was hosted by Camilla LAURETI, an Italian MEP who is one of the leading voices on water topics and moderated by Delphine DUPEUX, Director of Parliament Relations Intergroup at ELO. After these two introduced the topic and explained the event, the audience heard from 3 different governmental perspectives. Claudia OLAZABAL, DG ENVI, discussed the potential for water reuse in agriculture, Patrick KELLY, DG AGRI, explained the CAP role in improving water resilience in agriculture and Bernard DE POTTER of the Flanders Environment Agency, who gave the Flemish perspective on the situation.

The next portion of the conference was devoted to the outputs developed by the project. Daniel MONTELEONE, ELO, gave a speech thanking all the partners, and preparing the audience for Stephanie MOORE, TUS, who not only demonstrated the training modules but also presented the many case studies and reports that have been written by the project in such a short time. EUWAY was also very fortunate to have guests Stefano FRANZIA and Dr. Eng. Andrea CICHETTI give specific strategies to

retain water, based on work they've done in Romagna.

The final presentations were a round table discussion, with a variety of opinions, including Jan COOLS, Research Coordinator of the "Institute of Environment and Sustainable Development" at the University of Antwerp, Sergiy MOROZ, Policy Manager for Water and Biodiversity, EEB, and Henk VAN SCHAİK, Water and Heritage Ambassador of ICOMOS, who all gave their views not only on the outputs of the project but on water scarcity and related issues.

The meeting was followed by delicious snacks, cocktails and excellent conversations between the participants and the speakers. All the presentations were shared with the participants and will be available on the EUWAY website.

Overall, the EUWAY project has been an amazing success! All the outputs have been developed, including 5 national reports, and a summary report explaining the existing situation in Europe. Instead of 10 case studies, there was so much interest in the

topic, that the partners put together 12 case studies instead. The modules have been heavily reviewed (and complimented) by outside experts and stakeholders, and the pilot testing has been a success as well, with farmers and landowners from across Europe taking part. On top of all this, every single output has been translated into all the partner languages, including French, German, Italian, English, Slovenian, and Spanish.

Although the project ends March 31<sup>st</sup>, the outputs will continue to be developed for at least the next five years or even longer, including at the Forum for the Future of Agriculture as well as other huge international events. If you'd like to learn more about the project, be sure to visit the website at <https://euway-erasmus.eu/> or email the project coordinator at [Daniel.Montealeone@elo.org](mailto:Daniel.Montealeone@elo.org). If you're interested in any other collaborations on the topics of water, agriculture, or anything similar, the European Landowners' Organization is always open to discussing project opportunities that will help farmers and landowners traverse today's every more challenging landscape.



## Key solutions towards environmental sustainability – Forest Biomass, Biodiversity & Soil

Monday, March 25, 2024

14:00 – 18:30 (CET)

Residence Palace – Brussels

Under the umbrella of the



Co-organised by ForumforAg founding partner the European Landowners' Organization (ELO) and the Future Forest Initiative (FFI) this event is part of the Forum for the Future of Agriculture Annual Conference week.

The Future Forest Initiative (FFI) is a platform created in 2022 to foster the development of innovative and sustainable solutions for the forest in times of climate change. It is Europe's first Sustainable Innovation Hub for Forests and Climate. Based in Blankenburg (Harz), it combines the innovative power of startups, scientific knowhow and empirical values of the established economy. It also offers all necessary help to put practical solutions on the market. International participative events like the Future Forest Forum and the first startup accelerator for forests in Europe are two key elements of the support the FFI provides.

For more information : [www.forumforag.com](http://www.forumforag.com)



**CountrySide**

is a publication of the ELO  
in English and French

5 Euros

**Publisher :**

Thierry de L'ESCAILLE

**Chief editor :**

Emmanuelle MIKOSZ

**Text editor :**

Sophy SMITS van OYEN-MALTZOFF,

**Design & proof readers**

Jehanne de DORLODOT - VERHAEGEN  
Elodie CHAMPSEIX

**Back office:**

Adriana ESCUDERO

Rue de Trèves, 67  
B - 1040 Bruxelles  
Tel. : 00 32 (0)2 234 30 00  
Fax : 00 32 (0)2 234 30 09  
[countryside@elo.org](mailto:countryside@elo.org)  
Internet Site : [www.elo.org](http://www.elo.org)

# Forum for the Future of Agriculture 2024 Annual Conference



**Restoring the opportunity for food system transformation**

**Tuesday, March 26, 2024  
09:00 - 17:00 (CET)**

The Forum for the Future of Agriculture Annual Conference will be held on Tuesday, March 26, 2024, consisting of live broadcasts, moderated panel discussions and dialogues, interactive interventions, and networking opportunities.

We are pleased to invite you to join us in person or online in Brussels on March 26, where we will discuss the challenges facing the food system and the environment with some great speakers and panellists.

We are looking forward to taking forward the dialogue and to engage with you all.

## Founding & Strategic partners



## Supporting partners



## Currently confirmed speakers



**Sébastien Abis**  
Managing Director,  
Club DEMETER



**Stefania Avanzini**  
Director, One Planet  
Business for Biodiversity,  
World Business  
Council for Sustainable  
Development



**Saswati Bora**  
Global Director for  
Regenerative Food  
Systems, The Nature  
Conservancy



**Alessandro Cataldo**  
Partner, Head  
Transaction Strategy  
& Execution, EY  
Partneron Switzerland,  
and farmer



**Ranveer Chandra**  
Managing Director for  
Research for Industry,  
and CTO of Agri-Food,  
Microsoft



**Patrick Child**  
Deputy Director  
General, Environment,  
European Commission



**Máximo Torero  
Cullen**  
Chief Economist,  
Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations (FAO)



**Boris Erg**  
Director, IUCN  
European Regional  
Office



**Catherine  
Geslain-Lanéelle**  
Director Strategy  
and Policy Analysis,  
DG AGRI, European  
Commission



**Martin Hlaváček**  
Member of the  
European Parliament



**Chris Hogg**  
Global Head of Public  
Affairs, Nestlé



**Lee Ann Jackson**  
Head of Division,  
Agro-food Trade and  
Markets, OECD



**Amy E. Johnson**  
Conservation Biologist  
and Program Director,  
Smithsonian



**Jörg-Andreas  
Krüger**  
President, NABU



**Petra Laux**  
Chief Sustainability  
Officer & Head  
Sustainability and  
Corporate Affairs,  
Syngenta



**Ursula von der  
Leyen**  
President of the  
European Commission



**Samo Login**  
Founder and CEO,  
LoginEKO



**Janez Potočnik**  
Chair Forum for Ag  
and Chairman  
RISE Foundation



**Martin Reesink**  
Advisor to the Board  
on Food & Agri EU  
matters, Global Food  
& Energy Networks  
team, Rabobank



**Ana Roš**  
Michelin Star Chef



**Vanessa Stiffler-  
Claus**  
Vice President,  
International Policy &  
Strategy, John Deere



**Jurgen Tack**  
Secretary General,  
European Landowners'  
Organization



**Mark Titterton**  
Co-Founder & Director,  
Forum for the Future  
of Agriculture



**Thomas J. Vilsack**  
United States  
Secretary of  
Agriculture



**Mary Whittow**  
Principal Consultant of  
Sustainable Agri-Food,  
Anthesis Group

Latest agenda visit [www.forumforag.com](http://www.forumforag.com)