

CountrySide

European Landowners' Organization

N° 215

JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2025 - BIMONTHLY - EN

**ELO hosts conference
on the future of direct payments
in the CAP**



Editorial

Thierry de l'ESCAILLE, Executive President

Contents

- 3 ELO hosts conference on the future of direct payments in the CAP

- 6 ELO's initial contribution to the strategic dialogue on the future of agriculture in the EU

- 9 ForumforAg reconfirms Call to Action in submission to Commissioner HANSEN on Vision for European agriculture

- 10 "Biodiversity, Hunting, Countryside" Intergroup - Kicks Off with Strong Support

- 11 Transforming Passive Nature Conservation into Active Stewardship: A Conversation with Pille LIGI

- 12 Politics and good practices in peatland forestry – Finish example

- 13 EU-Mercosur agreement: Don't dream it's over

- 14 BOOK - The Déméter 2025

- 15 Future EU's Multiannual Financial Framework Joint Letter from the agri-food chain

If anyone had any doubts about what we are facing today, the train wreck in the Oval Office should make that clear. We need strong leadership in Europe and we need to stand tall. There is no more room for sterile debates on absurd issues.

Unfortunately, the 'Green Deal', however well-intentioned, has above all generated a great deal of confusion and a feeling that decisions have been taken without any concern for the well-being of the population, on the grounds that, given the urgency of the climate, we shouldn't waste time arguing.

The feeling that the measures taken in its name lack meaning, as expressed by many well-known voices such as Jean Marc JANCOVICI, are the source of bad-faith populism.

The opportunists of the 'Green Deal' and other 'green-washers' have been quick to take advantage of the illusions that have been created, and have only made matters worse. Today we are being asked real questions, to which the Green Deal's response is to reduce growth and make us all poorer, which disqualifies it if it is not corrected as a matter of urgency.

Not to do so is to accept that the rural world is not supporting our governments at a time when they need it most to face up to the existential challenge facing us!

There is an urgent need to improve the situation.





ELO hosts conference on the future of direct payments in the CAP

As the DG AGRI prepares to unveil its Vision for Agriculture and Food, the European Landowners' Organization (ELO) and the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) hosted a high-level conference on February 6 2025, to debate the future of direct payments and CAP reform. Featuring Commissioner Christophe HANSEN, MEP Paulo DO NASCIMENTO, Stoyan TCHOUKANOV, Prof. Alan MATTHEWS, Tassos HANIOTIS, and other experts, the event explored how to make CAP more targeted, resilient, and effective in the next funding period.

Wallerand VAN OUTRYVE D'YDEWALLE, ELO

From the Commissioner: Strengthening Farmers' Incomes and Market Power

Jurgen TACK, Secretary General of ELO, opened the event by reflecting on the turbulent years farmers and land managers have faced, adapting to new CAP rules and market pressures. He emphasised the need for a simpler, more targeted CAP that balances economic, environmental, and social objectives. He highlighted the importance of direct payments as the cornerstone of the policy but called for a reimagined approach to ensure they meet the needs of a rapidly changing agricultural landscape.

In a video message addressed to the audience, Commissioner Christophe HANSEN first underscored the need to strengthen farm incomes, accelerate generational renewal, and enhance sustainability in EU agriculture. He reiterated the central role of direct payments in income stabilisation but acknowledged their current limitations in redistributive efficiency, stressing the necessity for a more precise and impact-driven support model for the post-2027 period. Commissioner HANSEN then linked competitiveness in agriculture to the broader Competitiveness Compass and advocated for targeted investments in innovation, market resilience, and entrepreneurship. Addressing

the sector's exposure to climate risks, the Commissioner underlined the meaning of aligning CAP instruments with sustainability transitions while at the same time, ensuring food security and fair value distribution across the food chain. He also pointed to recent revisions in the Common Market Organisation regulation as part of a broader effort to reinforce farmers' bargaining power and correct structural discrepancies, reaffirming the Commission's commitment to a CAP that is both simplified and more attuned to the realities of the whole sector.

Rethinking CAP for a Resilient Agriculture

Paulo DO NASCIMENTO, Portuguese MEP and member of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development, underscored the pivotal role of direct payments in the CAP, highlighting their function in stabilising farm incomes, safeguarding food security, and promoting environmental sustainability. However, he warned that disparities in dependency levels across Member States and shrinking CAP budgets require a more targeted and strategic approach. The MEP stressed that the CAP budget, once the EU's largest, has now been surpassed by cohesion policy which to him, raises concerns about its future role in European agriculture. Acknowledging

the growing public resistance to higher food prices, he reminded participants that direct payments keep food affordable but despite this, the EU has lost 37% of its farms in recent years. DO NASCIMENTO called for a stronger link between agriculture and security policy and suggested that funds from the EU's security and defence budget should be allocated to food security, highlighting the notion that a Europe unable to feed itself cannot claim true sovereignty. Looking ahead, he outlined three key priorities for reform: better targeting of small and medium-sized farms, maintaining coupled support for vulnerable sectors, and leveraging innovation and digitalisation to drive agricultural modernisation.

Adapting Direct Payments to a Changing Agricultural Landscape

EESC Member and farmer Stoyan TCHOUKANOV first took the chance to emphasise on the urgent need to rethink the role of direct payments in the ever changing agricultural landscape. He highlighted that climate change, economic pressures, and rural depopulation are reshaping the sector, requiring a shift in CAP instruments toward resilience and adaptation. With 6,400 farms disappearing weekly, he argued that

business-as-usual policies are no longer viable and called for stronger support mechanisms that address market volatility and environmental risks. TCHOUKANOV stressed that direct payments should better reflect the real challenges farmers face, including increasing climate-related disruptions such as droughts and wildfires. He also pointed to the need for regulatory flexibility and noted that certain CAP rules—such as those restricting tree cover on grazing land—do not always align with sustainable farming realities. Looking ahead, he called for a more strategic use of direct payments, ensuring they support climate adaptation, market resilience, and long-term sustainability rather than simply serving as income stabilisation tools.

Rethinking CAP to Support Farmers and Sustainability

Professor Alan MATTHEWS first took a hard look at the efficiency of direct payments in the CAP. While acknowledging their role in stabilising farm incomes, he argued that the current system often benefits large farms that don't necessarily need income support, while failing to target funds where they could have the most impact. With small farms disappearing at an alarming rate, he questioned whether simply increasing payments to them is the right solution, suggesting that support should focus on helping farmers transition to more sustainable and competitive practices. Alan MATTHEWS proposed capping payments to larger farms and redirecting funds toward environmental measures, ensuring that CAP resources contribute to climate resilience and long-term viability rather than just income stabilisation. He also stressed the need for a stable policy, cautioning against frequent changes to the CAP. Instead, he advocated for small adjustments that would improve efficiency and deliver better results.

Soil Health as the Backbone of CAP Reform

Tassos HANIOTIS, former Director at the European Commission and an advisor for the Forum, made a strong case for a fundamental shift in the CAP's approach to direct payments. Rather than maintaining the current system, he proposed linking support directly to soil health, arguing that economic and environmental objectives must go hand in hand. He criticised the tendency to separate productivity and sustainability, stressing that both are essential for the long-term viability of European agriculture. HANIOTIS advocated for a performance-based model with multi-annual contracts, rewarding farmers for measurable improvements in soil quality rather than maintaining rigid area-based payments. He emphasized that policy simplification must focus on results, not just reducing paperwork, and warned against short-term political fixes that overlook long-term agricultural resilience. His



proposal aligns with the growing recognition that soil health is at the heart of food security, climate resilience, and sustainable productivity—a direction he believes CAP should fully embrace.

Supporting Regenerative Agriculture

Meghan SAPP from the European Alliance for Regenerative Agriculture highlighted the role of regenerative agriculture in addressing both environmental and economic challenges. She accentuated the need for a transition in direct payments to support practices that improve soil health, biodiversity, and carbon sequestration. She stressed the importance of peer-to-peer learning and knowledge exchange, arguing that farmers need to work together to adapt to environmental changes and develop resilient agri food systems. She also pointed out that while small farms often struggle financially, regenerative practices can increase profitability through cost reductions and improved soil health.

Balancing Direct Payments with simplification and Structural reform

Rudolf MÖGELE, former Deputy Director-General at DG AGRI and Honorary Professor at the University of Würzburg, brought a pragmatic perspective to the discussion, highlighting budgetary constraints, structural adjustment, and the need for genuine simplification. Professor MÖGELE stressed that the future of direct payments must align with very clear objectives and warned against policies that slow down necessary structural changes in the European agriculture system. He supported an improved targeting of funds, not simply shifting payments from large to small farms but also ensuring that they support resilience and long-

term competitiveness. He also questioned whether income support and environmental measures should be separated, suggesting that shifting green incentives to the second pillar could restructure policy and reduce administrative complexity. On simplification, Professor MÖGELE drew from his extensive experience in EU policy, arguing that true reform is not about removing rules for political convenience but about making CAP more transparent and functional for both farmers and national administrations. He emphasised that without structural changes, direct payments risk losing both economic efficiency and public legitimacy.

The Need for Result-Based Indicators

Théo PAQUET echoed the importance of result-based indicators in CAP reform. He argued that current payments do not sufficiently reward environmental improvements and emphasised the importance of multi-annual contracts to support sustainable farming practices. PAQUET also highlighted the diversity of European farms, noting that while soil is a key indicator for some, water pollution and other environmental factors should be considered for more intensive farming sectors such as livestock production. He finally stressed the need for longer-term policies that allow farms to adapt to sustainable practices over time.

Overall, the discussions held at the EESC made clear that while direct payments remain essential, their structure must evolve to reflect new agricultural and environmental realities. Whether through soil-based indicators, multi-annual contracts, or a shift to performance-based incentives, the CAP must ensure that European farming remains both competitive and sustainable.



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's initial contribution to the strategic dialogue on the future of agriculture in the EU

Following the kick-off meeting of the "Strategic Dialogue on the future of Agriculture", this article is summarising the paper offering an initial consideration over the "starting point" with regards to the transition towards a more sustainable and resilient food system and an introduction to a potential "vision" for a future EU food system.

1. The starting point

Climate change is the main challenge

While geopolitical challenges have been increasingly noticeable, climate change is the main challenge we face. Climate change is altering and adding uncertainty to our complex natural systems. Leading to increasingly unpredictable extreme weather events, faster desertification of vast parts of the world, megafires and biodiversity loss, which contribute to a self-reinforcing feedback loop of climate change. It translates into prolonged droughts, more erratic precipitation, and more frequent extreme events of storms, floods, frosts, hail, pests and disease and their effects on animal welfare, ecosystems, and natural processes and cycles. The availability of water, its management and storage and its quality are already of deep concern to agriculture in many parts of the EU. Uncontrolled climate change intensifies these challenges, making it more urgent to focus on mitigating the impacts of such occurrences in a strategic way and preparing for the new normal, which includes dealing with the increased vulnerability of our food systems.

Need to increase food resilience

Geopolitical tensions increase the risk of food insecurity as they impact both the availability and affordability of food but also of inputs necessary for the production of food. Recent events have shown the necessity of having a high level of access to European affordable food production. At the same time, keeping our leading position in global agro-food trade becomes increasingly important, as trade cushions the effect of events that disrupt agricultural production and food availability, particularly when in multi-polar trade systems. In fact, recent years have shown us the importance of not being too dependent on just a few actors, that it is important to consider that food security is linked to broader security considerations, and that it allows for the pushing for sustainable actions globally.

What is unsustainable cannot be sustained

Population and economic growth pressures, within an economic model that does not properly account for externalities, have meant that our natural resources of soil, water, clean air, and habitats have been misused over a long period. Climate change heightens this challenge. Our consumption and production systems are environmentally unsustainable and a transition to a new system is necessary. However, while our land-based sectors are being asked to shoulder most of the efforts, it is crucial to see the challenges and solutions in a more integrated approach, which includes the European food system but is broader than it. There is a tendency to attempt to fix the current lack of externalities account in our global economies only in the EU agricultural sector, by depleting the CAP for that purpose rather than attempting to create markets outside that mobilise other sectors and can go beyond the EU's borders.

Integrating externalities accounting over our economic models is a good start, and several steps are being attempted in that direction. Also, faster action should be expected from more linear processes, such as tackling the widespread food waste and phasing out fossil fuels from our production chains. Dealing with nature-based processes, that rely on the healthy functioning of ecosystem processes (water cycle, nutrient cycle...), where we cannot understand the problem by just looking at its parts, is more complex.

Poor integration of environment and economics

It is customarily stated that system sustainability requires balanced attention to economic, environmental, and social considerations. Yet, for our sector, different stakeholders invariably focus on one or other of these aspects. Environmentalists say that the food system's impacts on climate, biodiversity loss, and pollution are the greatest threat to long-run food security.

Farmers say that the biggest threat to food security is marginal and unprofitable

farming, leading to dependence on public subsidy, the disinterest of future generations in the sector and difficulties in integrating environmental concerns in their business decisions. Both views have a point and are related. However, correcting pervasive market failures and market imperfections of our economic models that do not reward public goods provision is not easy. Several issues need to be addressed to get a better grasp of the interplay between economy and environment.

There is no consensus on how to integrate externalities in the different value chains, namely in the food chain, and how to account for the real price of what we consume. Not only models, but also data needs to improve. In most analytical work based on the food systems approach, the economy is either absent or grossly assumed and environmental data are in need of collection and harmonisation. Biophysical models need to get the economy in their structure and economic models to better prioritise the environment. Also, while there is much basic data to assess the farm supply side, the rest of the food chain remains a black box. This contributes to a polarised and poorly structured debate.

Anti productivity sentiment

A lot of the current policy proposals arising from the Farm to Fork and biodiversity strategies push for both production de-intensification and land use change by taking land out of production, with little regard to the consequences of the combined pressure. A lot of thinking behind it implies the acceptance of higher food prices by consumers and the transfer of value to those asked to do more for the environment, which is highly optimistic.

Also, in recent years, agricultural productivity has increased at a slower pace than in other OECD countries, while the environmental sustainability performance of the sector has not improved in line with expectations. Productivity growth is essentially driven by the outflow of labour, and less by research or innovation. This is particularly problematic when in comparison with ma-



major competitors. The potential for increasing productivity sustainably should not be dismissed, and plenty of best practices demonstrate it.

Structural limitations

Europe is a highly urbanised continent with a long history that has implications in its rural landscapes and farm structures, making it much different from other parts of the world, including their main western counterparts. The latest agriculture census confirms that almost two thirds of the EU's farms were less than five hectares in size, with very many semi-subsistence farms. Also, the food supply chains are complex and farmers see themselves squeezed among much bigger players, who are not so regulated and subsidy dependent, and thus less susceptible to direct political interference and regulations. All these aspects contribute to the continued low profitability in agriculture compared to other sectors. While there is a social and cultural aspect that cannot be ignored, we must pay more attention to the viability of the sector when designing policies.

Also, even if the farmland area has been relatively stable, the demands over land are set to increase, as well as its degradation pressures. Therefore, having a multi-functional perspective of land use in Europe is crucial.

Polarisation of debate

There is general acceptance that there is no single or simple correction that can put things right quickly. Still, it is fashionable to suggest that the system must undergo a transition which may take two or three decades to work out and stabilise.

Unfortunately, whilst there is sufficient evidence on the need to act for a system change towards sustainability, there are strong disagreements about the main elements and directions of the required transition.

Also, the language surrounding the failings of the current food system is entirely negative and can be deeply dispiriting to those struggling to make a living from land – which is generally a risky, low margin business.

The fallout from the Green Deal: While the broad aims of decarbonisation and green growth agenda of the Green Deal are commendable, for the EU's agriculture and other land-based sectors, the deal implicitly supported the move towards a

less intensive agriculture and more land being taken out of production, particularly through its farm to fork and biodiversity strategies. These followed an approach of target setting (on organic area, pesticides cuts, fertilisers, protected areas, areas for restoration...) without much thought over its implementation and global consequences, as the lack of convincing impact analyses and general reactions demonstrated.

The present European Commission neglected real stakeholder participation towards many of the stakeholder groups in the European countryside: farmers, foresters, landowners, ... Only after the negative vote on the Nature Restoration Law in the European Parliament policy makers realised the need to talk with other stakehold-

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
www.goodgrowthplan.com

syngenta

ers directly involved. Suddenly all those stakeholder groups were invited by Commissioner Timmermans who was listening but without having the will to really discuss the problems accusing stakeholder groups of not willing to look at the scientific evidence. Throughout this period the frustrations by many stakeholders in the countryside was growing.

The complexity of the CAP: Even if the

newly reformed CAP only entered into force last year, general debate over the CAP is constant, normally negative, and with a vast number of different voices, different interests, and different involvement. This is an understandable condition, due to the vast history of a major policy that directly regulates the farming sector in all the EU countries, with all their challenges and differences, defining rules that need to fit all

types of agriculture, producing methods, ecosystems, rural dynamics and expectations being introduced over time. Also, its funds are still a big part of a small budget, generating “subsidy envy” among other EU policies, even if the agricultural sector remains the only economic sector to be fully regulated at EU level. Still, despite its problems, the CAP remains the best tool available for farmers.

2. The “vision” for a future EU food system: highlights

- We achieved carbon neutrality;
- We are part of a functioning international rules-based order that integrates externalities accounting in their economic models and legislation. We live under our planetary boundaries;
- Despite increased production variability, consumer needs and expectations are fulfilled. Expectations are centred around balanced and healthy diets;
- The EU is able to produce a greater part of the necessary affordable and high-quality food needed for its population;
- The EU continues to be in a leading trade position within a multi-polar trade system and trade agreements have a respected environmental chapter;
- The EU has been able to integrate advanced innovations in the agriculture production process: water management, genetics, bio control, robotics, monitoring...
- Knowledge and technological innovation are readily available to farmers and land managers that have autonomy and capacity to be innovative;
- The bioeconomy is much more developed, due to the phasing out of fossil fuels. Land-based sectors provide food and raw materials due to better use of land, productivity increases, and better integration in other value chains;
- No more waste. All by-products of one sector are used in others;
- Value chains are more equitable and transparent;
- We have much more knowledge and control over our natural cycles. The knowledge is available for land managers, including for preparedness actions that are adequately recognised. Land degradation is reducing;
- Markets for public goods / ecosystem services are much more developed;
- Private collaborative approaches for adaptation to climate change are facilitated and supported;
- Rural businesses have the capacity to be resilient, adaptive and attractive to others. Regulatory stability and the respect for property rights play an important role in their viability.

Soil Award
The Land and Soil Management Award

APPLY NOW
2025 EDITION

PRIZE
5,000 €, awarded to the winning project.
The Jury can also award a Diploma of Recognition.

WHO CAN APPLY
Farmers, landowners, land managers, groups of farmers, on their own or in collaboration with research institutes, universities and/or private companies.

HOW TO APPLY
Via e-mail to the Award Coordinator at emmanuelle.mikosz@elo.org

DEADLINE January 31, 2025

SCAN ME!

Logos: BOU, European Commission, JRC, ELO, KU LEUVEN, University of Ghent, syngenta

ForumforAg reconfirms Call to Action in submission to Commissioner HANSEN on Vision for European agriculture

In his letter to the new European Agriculture Commissioner Christophe HANSEN, Janez POTOČNIK has extended his congratulations to the new Commissioner on his appointment, reconfirmed the Forum's commitment to its Call to Action (CTA), first published in March 2023, and provided substantive input for the development of the vision on agriculture in Europe.



The letter highlighted the key challenges and opportunities that will arise in the next five years in making the European food system more resilient, competitive, sustainable, climate smart and nature positive. It also makes clear that the Forum stands ready to collaborate with and support the commissioner in developing his new vision of agriculture.

Several areas of importance to the Forum were raised in the letter along with its perspective on each of them:

- 1. Risks to Europe's food system:** Although Europe does not have a food security problem in the sense of some other regions, there are very serious risks to the agri-food system, such as access to healthy and affordable food, biodiversity loss, and a changing climate.
- 2. Needs of farmers, and land and forest managers:** Farmers and land and forest managers need access to finance to de-risk agriculture's transition; access to the best advice and information; and innovation in practices and technologies. "They must be able to take advantage of new opportunities to create or capture value... in ways that are inclusive, equitable and attractive, in particular for young farmers, and which value both food and ecosystem services".
- 3. Common benchmarking system:** Europe needs a common benchmarking system that can focus collective efforts on key priorities and outcomes, underpinned by robust monitoring, measurement, reporting, and independent verification of outcomes. Benchmarks should focus on significantly improved environmental outcomes for soil, water, greenhouse gas emissions, and biodiversity. They also need to include income growth; viability and competitiveness of all sizes of farmers and their businesses, especially young farmers; and rural prosperity.
- 4. Coherent policy framework:** Policies must be coherent, avoid conflicting and

incompatible objectives, and take a long-term perspective to enable desired outcomes. Too often we have seen different pieces of funding instruments, legislation and regulation in conflict with one another, creating confusion. The burden of interpreting, managing and responding to all this, falls on farmers and land managers, (and to be fair, the Member State authorities) leading to frustration, which can and does distract from achieving the overall objectives.

A systemic approach to financing the transition

In addition to the above, the letter clearly highlighted the need for and importance of a systemic approach to financing the transition which includes:

Recalibration and innovation in the use of public money – reforming and aligning the CAP to better address the complexities of the agri-food system and ensure it delivers for the environment and climate by providing the right incentives and avoiding perverse distortions. This should also mean moving ahead with the Agri-Food Just Transition and Nature Restoration Fund. It also involves the innovative use of fiscal measures, such as adjustments to taxation and better use or adaptation of corporate accounting rules, to better incentivise sustainable practices benefiting farmers, land managers, and foresters.

Unlocking private incentives – ensuring premiums for sustainably produced crops and livestock as well as the deployment of nature-based solutions, along with payments for ecosystem services such as carbon sequestration, improvements in soil health, water quality management, and biodiversity conservation and restoration, forms a critical part of the finance blend. Indeed, there is growing evidence that actors within and beyond the agrifood value chain are turning more frequently to emerging nature markets to incentivise farmers and land managers to adopt practices aimed at

achieving their climate, water replenishment or biodiversity restoration goals in the areas close to their developments/ activities.

Leveraging and de-risking finance – by some estimates, private financial institutions could potentially provide over €7 trillion in annual green financing by 2050, which the agri-food sector is well-positioned to access.¹ We must certainly make every effort to ensure that it is. Using accurate farm management data, from emerging technologies, aligned with benchmarking outcomes, can play a role in this by demonstrating to financial institutions that sustainability is profitable. In doing so, this data is monetizable because it enables farmers and land managers to use it to access the well of private finance capital and insurance at discounted rates, supporting their sustainability efforts.²

In his letter, Mr POTOČNIK **reaffirmed the Forum's CTA** containing seven specific commitments for change, originally published in March 2023, Commitments include scaling regenerative agriculture and nature restoration, positioning agriculture as a climate solution, aligning public and private incentives, and integrating sustainability into supply chains and global agri-food trade.

The full version of the letter and further information on the Forum's Call to Action annual report and update can be found at <https://forumforag.com/call-to-action-progress/>

¹ *Financing the net zero transition, McKinsey & Co article, January 2023*

“Biodiversity, Hunting, Countryside” Intergroup - Kicks Off with Strong Support



On March 2025, the “Biodiversity, Hunting, Countryside” Intergroup held in Strasbourg its first meeting for this parliamentary term, reaffirming its role as a key platform within the European Parliament for rural voices. The meeting focused on electing the Intergroup’s leadership and setting priorities for the years ahead.

MEP Juan Ignacio ZOIDO (Spain, EPP) was elected as President. There was also an agreement on the initial list of Board members: Alex Agius SSALIBA (Malta, S&D), Isabel BENJUMEA (Spain, EPP), Herbert DORFMANN (Italy, EPP), Pietro FIOCCCHI (Italy, ECR), Céline IMART (France, EPP), Stefan KÖHLER (Germany, EPP), Christine SINGER (Germany, Renew Europe), Riho TERRAS (Estonia, EPP).

Following his election, MEP ZOIDO stated: *“I am proud to lead this strong and diverse Intergroup, which brings together MEPs from different EU Member States and political groups, ensuring a wide representation of rural interests. With a balanced and dynamic board, we are ready to defend and promote the values and traditions of Europe’s countryside.”*

The European Federation for Hunting and Conservation (FACE) and the European Landowners’ Organization (ELO) were present at the meeting as the Intergroup’s co-secretariat. A provisional work programme for the Intergroup was agreed by the MEPs present.

Dr. Jurgen TACK, ELO Secretary General, stated: *“The nomination of the Intergroup’s board marks a crucial moment for*



Europe’s rural areas. As the only platform dedicated to advocating for the countryside, it must bridge the gap between policymakers and land managers. Together, we must ensure rural voices are heard and that policies support those who safeguard our land, food security, and biodiversity.”

Dr. David SCALLAN, FACE Secretary General, stated: *“With the support of over 100 MEPs from across the political spectrum, this Intergroup will be an essential platform to discuss a range of policy initiatives linked to the environment, sustainable hunting, and land use within the European Parliament. We will continue supporting*

open and constructive discussions between policymakers, the European Commission, and key stakeholders to promote the crucial role of rural communities in European policies.”

With a strong mandate and broad support, the “Biodiversity, Hunting, Countryside” Intergroup is set to be an important platform to debate policies that impact the countryside, conservation, and rural livelihoods across Europe.

For more information:
www.elo.org and <https://www.biodiversityhuntingcountryside.eu/>

Transforming Passive Nature Conservation into Active Stewardship: A Conversation with Pille LIGI

Pille LIGI is a passionate advocate for nature stewardship. As the head of the landowners' Nature Fund, she has dedicated the past three years to boosting private nature care and dissemination of landowners privately done actions on this field in Estonia. She is a Board Member at Sihtasutus Loodushoiu Fond, Estonia, and a member of Wildlife Estates Steering Committee, and Project Director of WESEM Erasmus.



Pille describes herself as “Carried by the wish of connecting different people and forestry, for finding the best possible solutions for positive change, I can see the potential development perspectives of implementing new ideas today, for the future. Initiating abilities with creative practicality and interest in optimisation guides my steps.”

ELO Countryside Magazine: Pille, tell us about the primary goals of the WESEM project.

Pille LIGI: The WESEM (Wildlife Estates and Land Ethic Mentorship) project is close to my heart. Our main goal is to transform how landowners approach nature conservation. Instead of being allowed only to be passive observers, we want society to see them as kind and ethical but nevertheless, active stewards of their land. So we are enhancing biodiversity and promoting practical sustainable ideas through vocational education training.

ELO Countryside Magazine: How does WESEM integrate VET to promote ethical and sustainable land management?

Pille LIGI: We have analyzed the gaps in forestry and agriculture curriculum and we created a specialized training modules for students and professionals in forestry, agriculture, and environmental sciences. As the nature restoration law has been voted to be implemented, we actually designed the course so that our landowners would know how to restore, not only conserve. This isn't just about imparting knowledge; it's about equipping them with practical skills they can use to advise landowners on

ethical land management. It's incredibly rewarding to see how this education can change perspectives and inspire action.

ELO Countryside Magazine: What are the key components of the WESEM training modules, do you really go out and guide them to sow differently?

Pille LIGI: We develop and test training content and platforms, create practical tools for land management, and establish a robust mentorship network. Practical tool includes a database with recommendation. Landowners frequently think - is it 10 or 100 meters feasible. We also organize workshops to foster a community of like-minded individuals who are passionate about nature stewardship.

ELO Countryside Magazine: How do micro-credentials play a role in WESEM's training program?

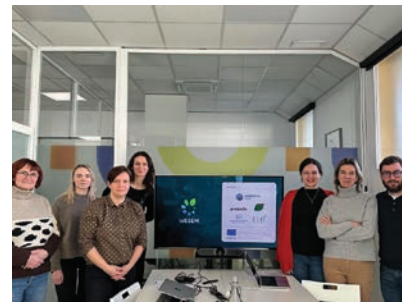
Pille LIGI: Micro credentials are a fantastic way to recognize and validate the skills and knowledge our participants acquire. Lets say Scotland landowner is interested of gaining nature restoration knowledge. The landowners union could approach to VET school and ask them to copy the microcredential study to be taught in school. At the end of the curricula successful end, landowner has a microcredential on the field of environmental science and he can apply for some restoration certification. It's a portable and shareable proof of their expertise, which can be combined into larger qualifications.

ELO Countryside Magazine: How does the mentorship model contribute to knowledge transfer?

Pille LIGI: Mentorship is at the core of WESEM. By connecting experienced pro-



WESEM students



WESEM Team

professionals with trainees and landowners, we facilitate the exchange of practical experiences and best practices. It's a two-way street where both mentors and mentees learn and grow. This model ensures that the knowledge gained is not just theoretical but applied in real-world scenarios. It's actually inspired from Sand County Foundation in USA, where one landowner advises other. As this is the source of info we believe in.

ELO Countryside Magazine: What role do the Wildlife Estate Label and its criteria play in promoting sustainable land management?

Pille LIGI: The Wildlife Estate Label is opportunity to prove that ideas and knowledge landowner has gained, has also been put into practice and reward has been Wildlife Estates label, that shows your sustainable practices. It's a way of celebrating and promoting excellence in nature stewardship.

ELO Countryside Magazine: How does WESEM ensure that the training content remains accessible and aligned with European standards?

Pille LIGI: We prioritize accessibility by developing e-learning platforms and practical tools. Our mentorship networks further enhance this accessibility. By adhering to quality assurance standards and integrating microcredentials into national qualifications frameworks, we ensure that our content is practical and aligned with European standards.

For more information:

Pille Ligi, Juhatus liige, Loodushoiu Fond, www.loodushoiufond.ee

Politics and good practices in peatland forestry – Finish example

Friday 24th of January saw a joint event by EUKI (European Climate Initiative), ELO and the Finnish Landowners' Association under the headline 'Politics and good practices in peatland forestry' up north in Oulu, Finland. The event saw many interesting presentations exploring how to improve the environmental impact of peatland use in the forested northern Finland.

Mikael LILIUS, ELO

Following a hearty lunch at the cozy Maikkula Manor just outside the city of Oulu, the event was kicked off by Kimmo COLLANDER of the Finnish Landowners' Association. To begin with, he laid out the now obvious truths: the draining of peatlands for forestry use is a historic fact, some of it very successful, some of it less so – but now our understanding of the climate impact is much better than before. So the question is, what are the best practices going forward in terms of climate and biodiversity?

To begin sketching out the answer to this very question, the scene was set by the first presentation of the day by Elsi KATAINEN, MEP from the Renew group. She gave an overview of the EU regulation of the peatland and forest space – noting that the EU has over 70 regulatory instruments touching on the use of forests. Given the importance of both peatlands and forests, and the climate objectives of the union, the EU is bound to have a continued interests in the area.

After a look at the political and regulatory side of things, the event went into a very practically oriented direction. Hannu HÖKKÄ of the Natural Resources Institute of Finland (LUKE) gave an informative data driven look at the developments with Finnish peatlands. Draining of peatlands for forestry started already in 1860's and went into high gear in the 1960's with the backing of World Bank financed programs to convert wet peatlands into forestry use. After looking at the historic trajectories and presenting newer environmental perspectives, HÖKKÄ gave a number of very practical suggestions for cutting techniques to minimize the emission impacts of forested peatlands.

The event continued with a look into the water-related aspects of peatlands. It is after all the water level that is at the heart of the climate impacts arising from peatlands. Taina IHAKSI from the Baltic



Taina IHAKSI from Baltic Sea Action Group interviewed by Kimmo COLLANDER from the Finnish Landowners' Association

Sea Action Group gave the attendees a great look into the problems with peatland draining as it had been historically accomplished and suggested a number of practical improvements and alternatives to manage the water flow of peatland areas to improve the biodiversity, climate impacts and the well-being of the downstream waterways.

The event closed by looping back to the fundamental issue of Finnish land-use – forestry. Finland is after all basically one big forest with some cities and lakes sprinkled around. First Heikki SUVANTO from the fertilizer company Rakeistus gave a detailed look at ash-based fertilizers specialized for peatlands, and what are the best conditions for their use. With proper fertilization the tree growth can be optimized, and thus the carbon capture in trees maximized.

Then, to cap it all and focus minds on why all this matters, Tapio KYLMÄNEN from the Oulu area Forest Management Association detailed the very concrete problems forest managers are facing due to the warming climate. The forested peatlands are challenging for forest management due to the softness of the ground. This is typically mitigated by doing the management actions either during the cold of winter, or in the drier midsummer period. As the climate continues to warm, winters are becoming milder and shorter, while summers are becoming rainier and wetter. Both of these developments are narrowing the window for effective forest management, thus making it more difficult to profitably manage these areas.

This raises the harrowing prospect: without necessary action, is there a future looming where forested peatland areas will become unsuitable for productive use?

EU-Mercosur agreement: Don't dream it's over

Ultimately the fate of the recently sealed European Union-Mercosur agreement will not be about beef or poultry or sugar. It will depend on how deftly the EU navigates difficult political currents in the next five years.

By John CLARKE, former Director for International Relations at the European Commission and senior EU trade negotiator. He previously headed the EU Delegation to the WTO and UN in Geneva.

On the grounds that all major trade negotiations deserve their own theme tune, what better for the Mercosur trade agreement than Crowded House's great song *Don't Dream It's Over*?

For it certainly isn't.

The announcement by smiling South American heads of state and European Commission president Ursula von der LEYEN of the conclusion of negotiations of an EU-Mercosur partnership agreement marks just the start of what will be a long and painful process leading to ratification at the earliest in 2026. So it's premature to break out the champagne or knock back the caiparinhas.

A long and winding road ahead

Let's look at the road ahead. The concluded agreement – which also covers political cooperation and development support as well as free trade, was concluded politically on Friday (6 December). This step simply means that the two sides agreed that negotiations are done and the text is stable. Cue the photographers.

It is the second time the agreement was concluded. This author was present the first time when Mercosur ministers and then-commissioners Cecilia MALMSTRÖM and Phil HOGAN jubilantly hugged one another on the 12th floor of the Berlaymont building in Brussels following final late-night haggling over beef and sugar quotas. Yes, even HOGAN and MALMSTRÖM hugged each other... mark the date: June 28 2019.

Lost in translation

The next step is 'legal scrubbing' followed by translating the agreement into all EU languages.

The legal check is largely done, given that most of the text was agreed five years ago, while the newly added protocol on sustainability has also done the legal rounds.

But translation will take some four to five months even with computer assistance: the commission's translation service is notoriously

reluctant to touch any document unless it's as scrubbed and pristine as a newborn baby.

Add to that some to-and-fro'ing between Brussels and Mercosur capitals to align the English, Spanish and Portuguese versions and one can predict the agreement will only be ready for adoption by the commission in the second quarter of 2025 at the earliest.

Then the real heavy lifting begins.

It's a rat trap

The commission *will* approve the agreement, although this will be an early and major test of collegiality. Several commissioners will have to leave their passports at the famous door and vote for or abstain on an accord their nominating countries vehemently oppose.

In sending the agreement to member states, the commission will have to decide if to maintain it as one single agreement that includes political cooperation, or to spin off the trade capsule of the Mercosur agreement from the mother-ship.

The agreement as a whole as it stands requires ratification by all member states' parliaments – and some regional ones. To avoid a repeat of the debacle over the Canada CETA agreement, which is still not ratified by member states and hence in a precarious position, the commission could seek to fast-track the trade capsule's adoption as an 'EU-only' agreement to circumvent approval by national legislatures. It took the commission two years to decide to do this with the FTA with Singapore.

It is clear to this author that the commission must propose a split as this is the only way the FTA can be adopted in our lifetimes. But the decision is controversial – easily painted by lobby groups and opponents as undemocratic. The Wallonian parliament will be up in arms!

Many battles are lost...many battles are won

On to the Council. Several EU member states, when they receive the text of the agreement, will be ambivalent about splitting, given the risk of domestic pushback. In a final ironic twist of the knife, a decision to split the agreement, because it trespasses into national political competences, needs unanimity in the council.

It will be a challenge for those member states opposing the agreement – France, Poland, Austria, Netherlands, possibly Belgium – to agree a split that would only accelerate the entry into force of an agreement they claim not to want. It's classic catch-22, not unlike the requirement in the World Trade Organization for a consensus to waive the consensus rule!

It is genuinely difficult to see how the council will approve the agreement unless this group of member states – who will not be able to muster a blocking minority – demonstrate real statesmanship and admit what they already know deep down: that the Mercosur FTA will benefit them economically and constitute a geopolitical necessity in a world where Europe has diminishing clout. Abstention may be their exit card...

In a best-case scenario, the split agreements will receive council benediction in autumn 2025 to be sent to the European Parliament for assent.

France and others will need major face-savers to accept the agreement going forward: at the very least an explicit commitment to implement seriously the sustainability chapter, independent verification of this, the possibility to pull the plug if things go awry, AND money for any affected farmers.

All eyes will then be on the 2027 Multiannual Financial Framework, whose preparation will begin early in 2025, to see if any money is earmarked for farmers.

And let's not forget the Mercosur states themselves who will again have to be pa-

tient bystanders. They will have to weigh their anxiety to get the trade concessions they won as soon as possible, which is only feasible with a split, against a fear that the political cooperation agreement gets kicked into the long grass or languish in national parliaments for years.

Mercosur needs this cooperation volet to help implement onerous sustainability rules in the trade agreement. So they will need reassurances and a clear timetable for the adoption of the Political Cooperation Agreement at the same time as the spinned-off FTA.

The boys are back in town

This tortuous process will unfold against a backdrop of raucous farmers' protests across the EU against the alleged onslaught of Mercosur beef, sugar and poultry imports.

Europe's main farm lobby group Copa-Cogeca have already predicted – some might say menaced – protests as soon as today outside the Council and beyond. This is nine months too early but a taste of what to expect at the key chokepoints in 2025 and beyond.

I predict vehement protests early next year once the new agriculture commissioner's advisory body starts to meet. The Mercosur agreement, regrettably, risks hobbling that body's work from the start and infecting commissioner Hansen's 100 Days masterplan for agriculture.

Anti-Mercosur sentiments may also stymie the commission's attempts to conclude much-needed FTAs with Australia, India and others.

And if a marriage of convenience emerges – again – between farm groups looking to stop imports, and NGO's campaigning against deforestation or lower production standards in the Mercosur countries, then the European Parliament will face an agonizing six-months debate before voting the agreement up or down in Strasbourg. MEPs cannot amend it.

All this drama despite the fact that imports of sensitive commodities represent a tiny fraction of EU consumption. All this despite the fact that the application to Mercosur exports of the EU's new deforestation regulation and corporate sustainability due diligence directive will de-fang previously controversial sustainability commitments in the agreement.

It ain't over till it's over

Lenny KRAVITZ understood the dynamics of trade deals. So we are now in late 2025. How will the parliament react? As ever the key is held by the European People's Party, the self-styled party of the farmers yet whose leader yesterday praised the agreement as good for Europe.

One hopes the EPP will stay positive, in the expectation that the other large group in parliament the centre-left S&D will be divided, centrist Renew Europe the same, whilst right-wing ECR is broadly in favour.

Mercosur will be a serious test of how the parliament squares its pro-growth, pro-competitiveness vocation with its populist and protectionist impulses. A conflict which we will see across much of the parliament's work for the rest of its mandate.

Who knows where the time goes

A last musical byline – the song I want at my funeral.

Ever optimistic, I continue to think it possible that the Mercosur agreement could enter into force sometime in mid to late 2026, if the commission presents it honestly as requiring trade-offs, like all difficult policies, and if EU member states prioritise the politi-

cal value of integration with the world's sixth biggest economy and democratic region.

In terms of the trade concessions, which will be phased in over seven years, we thus looking at 2033-35 for their full application.

Ultimately the fate of the agreement will not be about beef or poultry or sugar – they are proxies.

It will rather depend on how deftly the EU navigates difficult political currents in the next five years, how compelling are the arguments it makes in favour of cementing relations with South America at a time of increasing Chinese hostility and US unreliability, and whether our societies will continue to believe in the EU's democratic legitimacy and power for good.

This article was published in the Borderlex journal – news and analysis on trade policy in Europe, on December 2024. More information: www.borderlex.net

The Déméter 2025

UNDER THE DIRECTION OF SÉBASTIEN ABIS AND THE COORDINATION OF ANAÏS MARIE
25 €



On sale at iris-france.org
and on CAIRN
Published on 20 February 2025

As we enter a new quarter century, the range of possibilities between now and 2050 is as imprecise as it is limitless. Should we therefore declare it to be unreadable? It would be easy to say yes, especially as the geopolitical and climatic and climate change can lead us to pessimism and immediacy. When everything seems to be wavering and moving faster, our eyes turn away from what's essential. But we need to see into the distance, and to do that, we need to look ahead.

2050 is already tomorrow, and food and agricultural issues will continue to play a

central role: more people to feed, more appetites and different profiles among the players who will set the pace on the world stage, more production challenges to solve and more ingenuity to deploy. In these strategic arenas, determinations, competitions and tensions are bound to increase.

In order to move forward and prepare for the future without inevitably becoming disillusioned, it is essential to take a step back. Feeding 2050 will not just be a question of agricultural and food systems, which will have to be up to the task. It will also be about the ability to think differently, to combine analyses, ideas and experiences, to understand that complexity demands modesty and motivation, and to think in order to progress.

This 31st edition of Déméter takes us on a journey into the distant future, into a series of possible and contradictory futures, so that food fictions can enter into dialogue with agricultural realities.

- 12 analytical and forward-looking chapters
- Geo-economic, agricultural and agri-food focuses
- Maps, infographics and global statistics.

Future EU's Multiannual Financial Framework

Joint Letter from the agri-food chain

On February 2025, 28 organizations of the agri-food chain, including ELO, sent a letter concerning the Future EU's Multiannual Financial Framework to President VON DER LEYEN and Commissioner SERAFIN.

In light of the preparation of the upcoming Commission's proposals on the Union's Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for the post 2027 period, the undersigned organisations would like to bring some particular issues to your attention.

The political Guidelines for the European Commission 2024-2029 and your address to the European Parliament in July last year, clearly recognised and underlined the importance and relevance of agriculture, rural areas and food to Europe, its economy and their citizens.

Against the backdrop of your statement "(...) I will defend an EU income policy for Europe's farmers, and will ensure that the EU budget and our common agricultural policy is targeted" and considering the upcoming publication of the Commission's Vision for the Future of EU Agriculture and Food, we see with concern ideas of possible reallocation of EU expenditure within a Single Fund that, if followed, would completely transform the structure and governance of the next MFF and the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

Whilst the principle of simplification is supported by our organisations, we have deep concerns that the considered changes, if introduced, would neither bring simplicity nor less red tape for the following reasons:

- The idea of increased simplification and flexibility that implies the reallocation of EU expenditure within a Single Fund and with National Plans for all funds is contrary to the targeting of support necessary in some key policy areas, particularly the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP). Established in 1962 and financed through the EU budget, the CAP functions as a partnership between society, the agricultural sector and the agri-food chain.

It brings EU added value through guaranteeing a stable food supply and affordable prices for consumers, supporting farmers' incomes, achieving economic, environmental and social sustainability and contributing to vibrant rural areas.

- This exercise would lead to disastrous consequences for the EU agricultural sector, to more complexity and uncertainty for our 9 million farmers and would put at risk the stability and performance of the EU agri-food chain, increasing differences among Member States and resulting in the fragmentation of the Single Market, one of the building blocks of the EU and key blueprints for the term 2024-2029.
- It would also undermine the multiannual investment approach so necessary for farmers to improve their competitiveness and become more sustainable, while contributing to the stability and sustainability of the agri-food chain.
- This idea would also contradict the recent report of the Strategic Dialogue for the Future of EU Agriculture which calls not only for a "dedicated budget for the CAP" but also for separate (and individual) funds for an agricultural transition (AJTF) and nature restoration, outside the CAP.
- Last, but certainly not least, and based on the experience of the CAP National Strategic Plans, the preparation of streamlined "National Single Plans" for all EU funds, followed by the subsequent scrutiny, analysis, submission of comments to Member States, receiving amended plans, re-analysis and final approval of these single plans by the Commission services would represent a task of gigantic proportions likely to take very long and being very burdensome.

In our view, an increased and dedicated CAP budget remains fundamental for ensuring competitiveness, food security, balanced sustainability, for guaranteeing a decent income for farmers and securing stability and economic performance of the EU agri-food sector.

Additionally, and considering the current geo-political tensions and its impacts on the economy, we call for the inclusion, in the MFF of a flexible mechanism to adjust the committed appropriations to the real observed inflation (and not the projected one).

The commonality and adequate support of the CAP, one of the EU's oldest, well established-policies, should be maintained and treasured as an enabler for a resilient, sustainable agricultural and agri-food sector, to ensure fair competitiveness in an European common market, achieve EU's food security together with vibrant rural areas.

Any proposal to dismantle this framework would undermine core values of the EU and endanger its unity and future.

We hope you will consider these concerns during the preparation of the proposal for the next MFF.

Yours sincerely,



CountrySide

is a publication of the ELO
in English and French

5 Euros

Publisher :

Thierry de L'ESCAILLE

Chief editor :

Emmanuelle MIKOSZ

Design & proof readers

Jehanne de DORLODOT - VERHAEGEN

Back office:

Adriana ESCUDERO

Rue de Trèves, 67
B - 1040 Bruxelles
Tel. : 00 32 (0)2 234 30 00
elo@elo.org
Internet Site : www.elo.org

Forum for the Future of Agriculture 2025 Annual Conference



Exploring new frontiers for agri-food system transformation

Tuesday, April 1, 2025
09:00 - 17:00 (CET)

The Forum for the Future of Agriculture Annual Conference will be held on Tuesday, April 1, 2025, consisting of inspirational talks, live broadcasts, moderated panel discussions and dialogues, interactive interventions, and networking opportunities.

The Forum is proud to present a lineup of exceptional speakers for this year's Annual Conference!

They will all bring their own experiences to discuss a range of topics including:

- Geopolitics, the reality of our fears
- Financing the transition - climate, nature and farm profitability
 - Implementing the transition - what will make the difference
- Innovation for a profitable, climate-smart and nature positive agri-food system
- The future vision for agriculture in Europe

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

To discover the latest agenda and speakers visit www.forumforag.com

Currently confirmed speakers

 Tobias Bandel Co-founder, The Landbanking Group	 Grzegorz Brodziak Farmer & CEO Goodvalley, Poland & President of the Management Board, Polska Federacja Rolna	 Fred Buyle Freeriving World Record Holder, explorer and photographer	 Ranveer Chandra General Manager in M365 Copilot & Chief Technology Officer of Agri-Food, Microsoft	 Morgan Després Executive Director International Finance, Economy & Nature Programmes, European Climate Foundation
 Prof. Dr. Harald Grethe Director, Agora Agrar	 Tassos Haniotis Special Advisor for Sustainable Productivity, Forum for the Future of Agriculture; Senior Guest Research Scholar, IIASA	 Christophe Hansen Commissioner for Agriculture and Food, European Commission	 Deanna Kovar President of Worldwide Agriculture and Turf, Small Ag and Turf, Europe, Africa, and Asia, John Deere	 Jörg-Andreas Krüger President, NABU
 Petra Laux Chief Sustainability Officer & Head Sustainability and Corporate Affairs, Syngenta	 Mike Massimino NASA Astronaut and Professor of Mechanical Engineering, Columbia University	 Mairéad McGuinness Former First Vice President, EU Commission for Financial Services & CMU	 Katie McRobert Executive Director, Australian Farm Institute	 Janez Potočnik Chair ForumforAg and Chairman RISE Foundation
 Jurgen Tack Secretary General, European Landowners' Organization	 Bart Vandewaetere Vice-President ESG Engagement, Nestlé Europe	Confirmed moderators	 Rose O'Donovan Journalist & Editor AgraFacts	 Stephen Sackur International Broadcast Journalist

Founding & Strategic partners



Supporting partners

