

CountrySide

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**Forum for the
Future of Agriculture®**
Where agriculture & environment
meet for an open dialogue

2023 Regional Event in Spain





Editorial

Thierry de l'ESCAILLE, Executive President

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A drama of the Brussels debate is the negative tendency of certain players in civil society who take the liberty of saying no to any reflection or proposal whatever it may be. They do not realise that they are undermining the legitimacy of the European Union, which is being transformed by their actions into a power of outright prohibition. The temptation is strong for an administration that controls to prohibit, because then control is easy.

But this drift, backed by the idea that the world must be saved whatever the cost, is likely to pay a high price at the next elections: the disenchantment with Europe is palpable. The parties of the centre are tending to disappear, to be replaced by advocates of a radicalisation of debates....

In the meantime, the legislation needed to implement the Green Deal is being rushed through. While the authors of the legislation on nature restoration have all too often forgotten that there are people on the ground who live in nature and have unfortunately given the impression of having drawn up these texts in offices far removed from any biodiversity, a new piece of legislation is on the horizon which, we have no doubt, will once again be an opportunity for certain NGOs to assert themselves, even though what is being proposed could solve many problems: new genomic techniques, which raise issues of innovation and economic development, as well as mitigation of health and environmental risks.

These techniques offer beneficial improvements across a wide range of plants and traits and offer farmers what they are rightly demanding: if we take away some of their tools, let us give them others that will meet their needs. Unfortunately, it did not take long for the NGOs who have made it their business to banish the rural world to launch their virulent opposition.

Of course, we are in favour of vigilance, but we have to stop trying to turn the countryside into a museum. If we do not, the countryside will take refuge in the arms of extremes where it will no longer have any partners. The latest elections are sending out signals that it would be irresponsible to ignore.





Some of the participants of the Regional Event in Spain: (from left to right): Jurgen TACK, Antonio MELGAREJO NARDIZ, Gabriel LODARES, Pierre-Olivier DREGE, Thierry de l'ESCAILLE, Elena CARTEA GONZALEZ, Alain Dominique QUINTART, Alberto ARROYO

2023 Regional Event in Spain



Madrid was the venue for our latest regional event, on May 31, ahead of Spain taking the Presidency of the Council of the European Union. The opening session set the scene for the panel discussions to follow, with messages from a wide variety of stakeholders. Moderator and agricultural journalist Elisa PLUMED kicked off by thanking the hosts, the Spanish National Research Council (CSIC). CSIC is the largest public research institution in Spain and one of the most renowned institutions in the European Research Area.

Liz WILSON

More on CSIC came from Elena CARTEA GONZÁLEZ, Vice President, Scientific and Technical Areas, as she welcomed delegates. With thousands of employees including researchers, headquarters in Madrid, 121 institutes and national centres in Spain, and centres in Rome and Brussels, CSIC's mission is to improve scientific and technical research. Ms GONZÁLEZ highlighted the focus on sustainable agriculture, from biotechnology, soil fertility and sustainable production to agricultural policies, economic analysis and food systems.

Focusing on forests

Forests are a key part of that sustainability and will be a particular focus for the Spanish Presidency. That was the message from Hugo MORÁN FERNÁNDEZ, Secretary of State for the Environment in the Spanish Ministry of Ecological Transition and Demographic Challenge. The European Union represents 5% of the world's total forests and landowners are essential players – in Spain, for example, 70% of forest land is privately held. The Spanish Presidency will aim to improve coordination with EU countries on forest-related matters, specifically asking

Member States to focus in depth on EU forestry legislation and governance. *"We hope we will include all of you in order to achieve the goals successfully,"* he ended.

The role of landowners as part of the solution

What role exactly do landowners play? Gabriel LODARES, Vice President of the European Landowners' Organization, posed this question. The voice of these mostly family-run companies must be heard when it comes to transforming agriculture. Landowners are often blamed for being emitters of CO₂ and methane, and producing meat which some see as unhealthy, yet they are very much part of the solution. And landowners are under threat themselves, faced by rising prices and rural depopulation. But everything that Europe wants to achieve through the Green Deal is in their DNA. *"We need to adapt to the new reality, and landowners play a major role in this."*

Making progress in the EU

The good news is that Europe and the Green Deal are making progress – and there

is concrete evidence of that. Catherine GESLAIN-LANÉELLE, Director Strategy and Policy Analysis at DG AGRI, European Commission, gave the delegates an update. Criticism is sometimes levelled that the Green Deal is not moving ahead, she said. Yet there is evidence to the contrary: for example, the new Common Agricultural Policy has been adopted, as has regulation on deforestation; an action plan on organic farming is under way, and the sustainable use regulation to reduce pesticides is being discussed. She highlighted that transition in agriculture also relies on funding and it is not just about the Common Agricultural Policy, (CAP) but also a need for other investment at farm level and in the food chain. One aspect that could be very helpful is carbon farming.

In a special video recording, Daniel CALLEJA CRESPO, Director-General, DG Legal Service, European Commission explained, *"We are at a decisive moment for the EU and for our planet,"*. He described how agriculture has a key role to play and is itself facing crucial challenges. *"I would like to reaffirm the EU's commitment to design, to promote and to develop policies that support innovation and the transformation of the agricultural sector."*

Fixing tomorrow, today

To wrap up the first session, Janez POTOČNIK, Chairman of the Forum for the Future of Agriculture, spoke with Mark TITTERINGTON, Senior Adviser, Strategy & Partnerships, Forum for the Future of Agriculture.

Fixing tomorrow, today was the theme of the ForumforAg annual conference and Mr POTOČNIK returned to it. Economies have been organized in a wasteful way: the challenge is to change to meet human needs and maximize well-being in the most energy and resource efficient way, he said.

How do we go about that? Start by re-ordering our priorities so that the economy serves humans and not vice versa. See humans as part of nature, not external to it. Move from stimulating extraction-based models to promoting more innovation and creativity-based models. And change our system of governance.

His final word was praise for the entrants to the *Land and Soil Management Award*. Not just the winners but all the entrants who have shown in concrete ways that they can change the world for the better.

Panel debate: Sustainable production increases trade?

How is Europe's vision of agricultural sustainability affecting international trade? Is sustainable produce welcome in other countries? How do they view these policies? These questions opened the first panel discussion.

Sustainability is not negotiable, said Samuel JUÁREZ CASADO, Advisory Member of the General Secretariat for Agriculture and Food at the Spanish Ministry of Agriculture. And sustainably produced produce will have a competitive advantage in the future. One current issue is that there are no agreed standards internationally or even within the internal market. *"There is still a lot of work to be done at the EU and international levels before sustainability attributes can make a difference."*

The international perspective was on the mind of Pedro GALLARDO, a farmer and Vice President of COPA-COGECA, which represents farmers and cooperatives, as well as Vice President of ALAS (Alliance for Sustainable Agriculture). Europe cannot be an island because we live in a global world, he reminded delegates. With population growth, Europe will need to produce for third countries. But this will not be easy to achieve because, while Europe is fostering sustainability, it is not supporting farmers and cooperatives sufficiently. *"We've always said it clearly: we can have greener agriculture if we have the money. Farmers*

have adapted but we truly need European legislation supporting us."

Rosa VAÑÓ, immersed in the trade in sustainable agriculture, highlighted the lack of credible consumer communication about sustainability. Founding Partner of Castillo de Canena, her business practices regenerative agriculture which produces olive oil that is then sold in more than 60 countries. One of the impediments to trade, she said, was lack of an undisputed green certification.

Will consumers pay for sustainability?

Another issue was the thorny question of whether consumers will pay more for differentiated products. This topic was taken up by María CRUZ VACA ESCRIBANO, Director of Economic Affairs, ANGED, an organization representing large distribution companies. If asked whether they will pay more, consumers say yes – but when you drill down into the data, the most important factor for them is price. *"We need to be efficient enough so we can offer differentiated quality, sustainability and an attractive price,"* she concluded.

The panel considered the wider perspective of how the rest of the world sees the Green Deal. The view from Brazil came from Bruno CAPUZZI, Policy Officer at ApexBrasil, the Brazilian Trade and Investment Promotion Agency. He pointed out that the Green Deal is outward looking, and it tries to influence the preservation of the environment in a holistic way. Nevertheless, countries are fully entitled to regulate their imports to preserve animal life and plant health as agreed in the rules-based trading system. So there will need to be many more discussions when it gets closer to implementation.

This brought up the topic of "mirror clauses", which aim to guarantee that imported products are produced under the same social and environmental standards as EU products, and the need to ensure that producers are competing on a level playing field. Are mirror clauses feasible, asked the Moderator, a question which sparked intense discussion.

The panel debate ended with a short discussion about the US Inflation Reduction Act and its fiscal incentives based on increased productivity through science – a philosophy which Europe shares. Questions from the audience completed the first panel session.

Panel debate: Improving biodiversity & water resilience & soil through farming - What role for regenerative agriculture?

What is regenerative agriculture? The session began with the panellists' views as a way to identify common thinking.

Ernesto IGARTUA ARREGUI, a biologist and Coordinator for the subarea of Agricultural Sciences and Technologies at CSIC, kicked off: *"An agriculture that not only thinks about production but also has the goal to improve the environment. That is easy to say, but difficult to do."*

That definition was echoed by Mónica ANDRÉS ENRÍQUEZ, EVP Europe, Yara International. Regenerative agriculture is about transforming agriculture and the entire food chain by providing solutions that include nature in every decision made to give more value-added impact.

Robert RENWICK, Head Business Sustainability EAME, Syngenta Crop Protection, built on these contributions, explaining that *"regenerative agriculture is an evolution of an agriculture that has long been practiced"*. Its approach is to focus on soil health, protection of biodiversity and better use of natural resources. In the long term, it is about protecting the soil and also profitability for farmers. Innovation is also important: as well as agronomic practices like sowing cover crops and incorporating livestock, regenerative agriculture includes precision application techniques.

Everyone needs to be aware of regenerative agriculture

Picking up the theme, Ana RENGIFO ABBAD, a biologist, conservationist and a founder of Islas de Corcho Natural (Natural Cork Islands), said there is a need to raise awareness about all these practices and tools, so that everybody has the means to practice regenerative agriculture.

Speaking as a farm operations manager, on a family farm in a depopulated rural area of southern Spain where conditions are dry, Alfonso CHICO DE GUZMÁN said regenerative





Gabriel LODARES, ELO Vice-president, Antonio MARTINEZ, Olive Oil Interprofessional, Thierry de l'ESCAILLE, ELO Secretary general, Prof Adela PEREZ GALVIN, University of Córdoba.

During the Regional Spanish Event, the ForumforAg had the opportunity to handover in person the Land and Soil Management Award Diploma of Recognition to INNOLIVAR, which we recognized for its valuable contribution to control erosion and restore gullies in olive groves.

tive agriculture is about taking actions that can improve water and biodiversity. Practices vary because there are different ways of achieving that. What is common to all crops is to try to generate returns: obviously it is essential to have an economic return, but also environmental returns such as restoration of ecosystems and reforestation, and social returns, like trying to repopulate the area.

Turning to the land he manages at La Junquera, he said rainfall has fallen dramatically. Among the practices used in mitigation are the creation of ponds and ditches, applying compost, and encouraging biodiversity through planting hedges of trees, bushes, and aromatic plants.

Regenerative agriculture can tackle climate change

The topic of declining rainfall resonated with the panel and the audience – severe

droughts have had a devastating effect on Spanish harvests, including this season. Regenerative agriculture can help mitigate both lack of rainfall and soil erosion, they agreed, through promoting soil health. Ernesto IGARTUA ARREGUI summed up: *“With regenerative agriculture, with the improvement in the soil, with diversification, we can tackle terrible situations such as we see this year.”*

The panellists acknowledged that farmers are the first to be impacted by climate change, especially water scarcity, flooding or extremes of temperature.

Closing conclusions: optimism, frustrations and the need for concrete action

Where have we got to in the transition that our food system needs, to one that produces healthy and affordable food with regard for the environment that produces that food? A stimulating closing conversation

between Alberto ARROYO, Head of Policy and Programme at the IUCN European Regional Office, and Mark TITTERINGTON, highlighted the main takeaways.

They agreed that there is a sense of optimism around the transition, and that all the players are working towards the same objectives, even if not everyone agrees on the “how” of getting there. Regenerative agriculture is gaining momentum and it is accepted that there are a variety of practices that can all be considered as sustainable. Despite that there are some frustrations: the sector has not yet scaled up enough, it is not systematic in the way things are done, and discussion on policy and regulation have become increasingly polarized.

As Europe goes into the next phase of the reform of the CAP, it is important to stand back and ask what kind of a food and agricultural system we want. That also means having all the right people contributing to the debate, leading to a more comprehensive view of agriculture. What is also important is to start taking concrete action – and the recent “Call to Action” and update statement from the Forum for the Future of Agriculture are examples of that.

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ELO General Assembly in Madrid: change in leadership

The European Landowners' Organization (ELO) held its General Assembly in Madrid on June 1, marking a significant moment for reflection, exchange, and celebration of the organization's accomplishments over the past year. The event brought together dedicated professionals and esteemed individuals who have played pivotal roles in promoting a prosperous and attractive European countryside.

This General Assembly was particularly special as it served as a platform to honor the remarkable journey of Thierry de L'ESCAILLE, the former Secretary General of ELO since 1995, who has transitioned into the role of Executive President. With 28 years of unparalleled dedication, passion, and hard work, he has been the driving force behind ELO's success and most significant achievements. ELO expresses deep gratitude for his unwavering commitment and outstanding leadership, which has propelled the organization to the forefront of the agricultural, environmental, and rural activities' sectors.

ELO would also like to express its gratitude to Pierre-Olivier DRÈGE, the former President, who has transitioned into the role of Honorary President. His contribution to the organization has been invaluable, and ELO acknowledges his ongoing support and wisdom.

ELO warmly welcomes Jurgen TACK as the new Secretary General. He served as ELO's Scientific Director for the past seven years, and is now embracing his new responsibilities.

More information is available on the ELO website.

Throughout my career, I've always been working at the forefront of sustainability related policies: first in Africa (Kenya) with the focus on coastal biodiversity; later through my tasks as coordinator of the Belgium Biodiversity Platform, as Director of the Research Institute for Nature and Forest, and finally at the ELO.

I have learned that only if you directly and actively engage with stakeholders you can reach biodiversity and climate goals. Without their support it is impossible to reach the biodiversity and climate related goals and objectives. .

ELO has always been and we'll be a very strong advocacy organisation. At the same time we are a membership association, so we have to make sure that what we are defending at the European level is aligned with the vision of our members. We need to further build on the relationship with each of them so we come to policy solutions which are supported by all. For that we will further strengthen our communication with them.

To support our long term work we need a sound management basis – so we are setting up a number of management tools which are guaranteeing our lobby work can be done in the most optimal way.

It is crucial to add that we have members beyond the 27 EU Member States. It has to be clear that without an active involvement of the countries directly surrounding the European Union (and beyond), we are not able to tackle the main questions related to food security, to biodiversity loss, to climate change... . So, ELO also has a role to play at the global level.

But whatever we do now and in the future, private property rights remain at the center of our work. We are in favor of sustainability solutions, but on the strict condition that sustainability is also including economic and social aspects. Whenever we are trying to change methodologies, legislations, technologies, we always must make sure that there is a better alternative than the one we want to change. If this is not the case there is no reason to change policies at all costs.

Jurgen TACK, ELO Secretary general

Rethinking Arable Farming in a Changing Climate - The Agronomy of Climate Smart Farming to Deliver on the EU Green Deal

European landowners, industry leaders, and agronomy experts gathered on May 4, to participate in the insightful event titled “Rethinking Arable Farming in a Changing Climate.” This impactful symposium, organised by the ELO in collaboration with Bayer, Yara, and Netafim, aimed to address the pressing challenges posed by climate change and offer practical solutions for sustainable agriculture. The event’s primary objective was to explore the vital role of climate-smart farming practices in achieving the ambitious goals of the EU Green Deal.

Laura TICOIU, ELO

During the event, keynote addresses from esteemed agronomists delved into critical topics, including irrigation, fertilisation, and integrated pest management. These sessions showcased innovative practices that are revolutionising the agricultural landscape and paving the way for a resilient future. By providing tangible solutions, the event brought to the forefront the available tools farmers have to implement climate-smart approaches in their own fields, and that are necessary to adapt in the face of an ever-changing climate.

The event featured presentations from the collaborating organisations, each shedding light on crucial aspects of sustainable farming. Bayer’s presentation centred on integrated crop management, underscoring the significance of effective weed, pest, and disease control. Yara focused on optimising nutrient management to enhance crop productivity while minimising environmental impact. Netafim, on the other hand, explored the role of precision irrigation in improving climate resilience and water management practices. The French Grain Growers’ Association (AGPB)’s presentation highlighted innovative tools and practices that support farmers in their journey towards sustainable agriculture, with a particular emphasis on ensuring farmers’ access to these resources.

The event also featured a thought-provoking panel discussion followed by a closing high-level dialogue. The panel discussion centred around the question of what farmers need to mitigate and adapt to climate change. Distinguished speakers, including representatives from DG CLIMA and the European Environmental Bureau, joined AGPB and Yara, offering diverse perspectives on the topic. This dynamic exchange of ideas allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the challenges and opportunities in sustainable agriculture. The high-level dialogue between the European Commission and



Tiffanie STEPHANI, Celia NYSSSENS, Natasha FOOTE, Giulio VOLPI, Philippe HEUSELE

industry leaders, represented by the Deputy Director General of DG AGRI and the Head of Strategy & Sustainability at Bayer Crop Science, provided a platform for policymakers and key industry stakeholders to discuss the role of policy in enabling the farming sector to achieve the objectives of the EU Green Deal.

As part of the event, an exclusive scientific interview titled “Arable farming needs a systems perspective” featured the three keynote speakers: Martin van ITTERSUM, Frank EWERT, and Jorgen EIVIND OLESEN. This engaging discussion provided invaluable insights into the challenges and opportunities that arable farming faces in the context of a changing climate. The speakers underscored the importance of adopting a holistic and systems-based approach, recognizing the intricate interplay between agriculture and the environment.

The event’s significance for farmers and private landowners cannot be overstated. With climate change imposing its undeniable impacts on agriculture, the event served as a catalyst for change, opening a hands-on dialogue on applied solu-

tions and innovative practices that farmers can implement. The insights shared by esteemed agronomists and industry experts provided a comprehensive roadmap, guiding farmers and policymakers alike towards a more sustainable and climate-smart future.

All in all, the “Rethinking Arable Farming in a Changing Climate” event proved to be a pivotal moment in the agricultural sector. Through collaboration, knowledge sharing, and networking, the event highlighted the urgency of embracing climate-smart farming practices. By having these practices at hand, farmers can mitigate some of the effects of climate change while ensuring sustainable productivity and environmental stewardship. The symposium demonstrated the power of collective action and emphasised the crucial role of collaboration between industry, agronomy experts, and farmers in paving the way for a sustainable future in the face of a changing climate.

More information is available on the ELO website.

Life European Networks for private land conservation (ENPLC)

ENPLC intend to build a community of European land conservation practitioners who work together on testing and upscaling the most promising tools for private land conservation, advocating for better financial incentives, engaging citizens, and raising public awareness.

ENPLC is an EU-wide network, a union between landowners and conservationists.

Marie ORBAN & Anne-Sophie MULIER, ELO

At ENPLC, we believe individual action leads to a domino effect. We hope our ambassadors inspire you! For more details, their stories are available on the **ENPLC website**.



Meet our ambassadors, they are Private Land Conservation Superheroes!

AMBASSADOR #8 -

Ando EELMAA, family farm manager for 30 years in Estonia

Ambassador #8 - Ando EELMAA, family farm manager for 30 years in Estonia. Ando was born on the Korjuse-Vanapere farm, and at least ten generations of his ancestors cultivated the same land before him. Since the 90s, Ando worked really hard to give a fresh start to the family business. Managing the farm is more than a job. It is the mission of his life.



AMBASSADOR #9 -

Oriol BAENA CRESPO, Land Stewardship Agreements technician at the Catalan Herpetological Society (SCH).

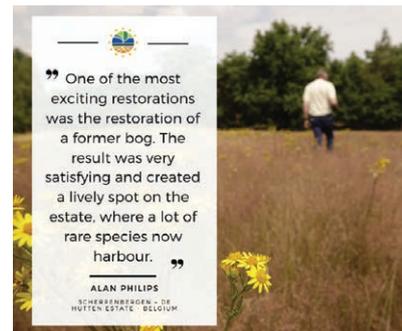
Oriol manages around 50 ha of land for the organisation. From cropland to rivers, ponds to grasslands to forests. SCH takes care of diverse landscapes with particular attention to aquatic habitats. He is conserving not well-protected animals and endorses the responsibility of such a role.



AMBASSADOR #10 -

Alan PHILIPS, manages the family estate for 30 years in Belgium

Alan is a Belgian landowner who manages a picturesque estate where woodlands, crescent dunes, purple heather, grasslands and marshes landscape the sandy soils. He started experimenting with nature to restore all parts, bit by bit, to their former glory. Once an experiment was successful on a small scale, he copied it to a larger area.



We are honoured to have them on board and will share more stories pretty soon. Stay tuned.

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Coexistence of Livestock Farming and Large Carnivores in Europe: Finding Solutions for Sustainable Development



Delphine DUPEUX, ELO

A significant workshop focusing on the **Coexistence of Livestock Farming and Large Carnivores in Europe** was jointly organized, on July 5, by the NAT and ENVE Commissions together with the Intergroup on Biodiversity, Hunting, Countryside of the European Parliament. This event aimed to address the growing challenges faced by shepherds and rural communities due to the increasing number of carnivores in EU Regions. By exploring potential solutions

and best practices, the event sought to strike a balance between the protection of EU animal species and the resolution of conflicts at various levels.

As mentioned by Isilda Maria PRAZERES DOS SANTOS VARGES GOMES, the Chair of the NAT commission, the problem of the coexistence of livestock farming and large carnivores in Europe is not new, but it is becoming increasingly difficult to manage as the number of carnivores increases. She

recalls that the European Committee of the Regions had previously highlighted the challenges faced by shepherds in certain regions as early as 2019. The sustainability of pastoralism, crucial for rural areas, is under threat due to conflicts arising from the presence of large carnivores. Extensive grazing not only supports biodiversity but also helps combat erosion and forest fires. In response to the challenges raised by pastoralism, the Committee of the Regions proposed several measures. They called upon

Use of derogation under Article 16

Member State	Species
BE	Wolves (until 04/2019) - Lynxes (until 09/2016)
BG	Bears (until 12/2020)
CZ	Wolves (until 05/2020) - Bears (until 12/2020) - Lynxes (until 12/2020)
DK	Wolves (until 12/2020)
DE	Wolves (until 12/2020) - Lynxes (until 12/2020)
EE	Bears (until 12/2020)
EL	Bears (until 05/2017)
ES	Wolves (until 12/2020) - Bears (until 12/2020)
HR	Wolves (until 07/2020) - Bears (until 03/2019) - Lynxes (until 07/2020)
IT	Wolves (until 12/2020) - Bears (until 12/2020) - Lynxes (until 08/2019)
LV	Lynxes (until 03/2020)
LT	Wolves (until 10/2020) - Lynxes (until 12/2019)
HU	Bears (until 08/2018)
NL	Wolves (until 12/2020)
AT	Wolves (until 12/2018) - Lynxes (until 03/2019)
PL	Wolves (until 12/2020) - Bears (until 12/2020) - Lynxes (until 12/2020)
PT	Wolves (until 12/2020)
RO	Wolves (until 12/2020) - Bears (until 12/2020) - Lynxes (until 12/2020)
SK	Bears (until 12/2020)
FI	Wolves (until 06/2021) - Bears (until 12/2020) - Lynxes (until 12/2021) - Wolverines (until 01/2021)
SE	Wolves (until 02/2021) - Bears (until 10/2020) - Lynxes (until 03/2021) - Wolverines (until 01/2021)



MEP Simone SCHMIEDTBAUER

the European Commission to assess the need for revising the Habitat Directive, allowing for quicker reactions to population changes of protected species. This proposal received significant support from the Ministers of Agriculture during their recent meeting in Luxembourg. Environment Commissioner Virginijus SINKEVIČIUS acknowledged that Member States have the option to approve individual derogations under Article 16 of the Habitat Directive, permitting the killing or capture of specific wolf or bear specimens under certain conditions. A study from the EPRS commissioned by the Committee of the Regions explored the measures implemented by Member States in this regard.

As recalled by Simone SCHMIEDTBAUER, MEP & Vice-President of the European Parliament Intergroup on “ Biodiversity, Hunting, Countryside”, the European Parliament’s resolution on the protection of livestock farming and large carnivores adopted in 2022 emphasized the importance of assisting regions facing conflicts in making responsible use of the flexibility provided by Article 16(1) of the Habitat Directive. But Juan Carlos SUÁREZ-QUIÑONES, regional minister of the environment, housing and land planning of Castilla y Leon as well as Paula FERNANDEZ from Cantabria highlighted the incomplete application of the subsidiarity principle in some member states, where the regional level competences have been overruled at national level. Jurgen TACK, Co-chair of the EU Platform on Coexistence between People and Large Carnivores, insisted on the key role played by the EU Platform in facilitating collaboration and knowledge exchange between the stakeholders involved. The goal of the platform is therefore to minimise conflicts and find solutions between human interests and the presence of large carnivore species, while promoting mutual respect and constructive engagement.

The collaboration between the NAT Commission, ENVE Commission, and the Intergroup on Biodiversity, Hunting, Countryside of the European Parliament highlights the collective effort to address these challenges. During the event, participants discussed various coexistence measures that have proven effective in different regions of the European Union. These measures include the use of electric fences, active shepherding, and livestock guarding dogs. Encouraging Member States to support farmers in preventing damage by large carnivores through their Common Agricultural Policy Strategic Plans was also emphasized. As the President of the NAT Commission, Isilda MARIA PRAZERES DOS SANTOS VARGES GOMES expressed her commitment to taking the proposals discussed during the event to the European institutions. The objective is to strike a balance between protecting EU animal species and finding practical solutions to conflicts at national, regional, and local levels.

More information is available on the Intergroup’s website.



Sabien LEEMANS, Delphine DUPEUX, Humberto DELGADO ROSA, Victoria GUTIERREZ

ELO at the Green Week

Adam HOLUB, ELO

The EU Green Week of 2023 (a series of events providing the opportunity to discuss pressing environmental topics) was marked by a vocal presence of the ELO at its main conference. In a diverse panel (alongside representatives of Commonland, WWF, and organic farmers), the ELO’s Director of Parliament Relations, Delphine DUPEUX, took part in a discussion titled “Restoring Biodiversity: Can societies and ecosystems live in a healthy relationship?” The topic of the debate could not have been more timely, as it took place in the run-up to the key votes on the Nature Restoration Regulation in the European Parliament.

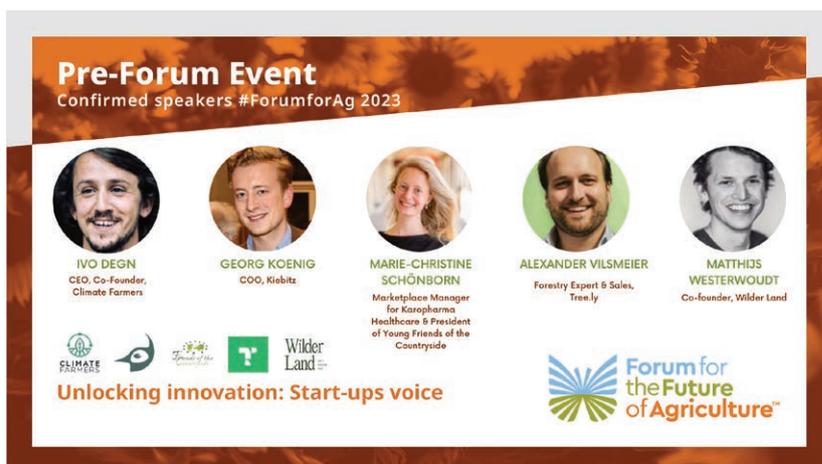
The main points voiced on behalf of the ELO were the accentuation of the need for the use and scaling up of private conservation measures, insistence on the need for viable business models for landowners, and the emphasis on the need to build trust and listen to the landowners and managers. Delphine DUPEUX also emphasised the importance of voluntariness in getting landowners on board and called for new governance models to be explored unlocking new ways of cooperation with private landowners. The ELO also used this occasion to repeat that the organisation cannot be pleased by the level of polarisation that is currently taking place at the EU level on the Nature Restoration Regulation. The ELO reiterated the urgent need to build trust and dialogue that is deeply needed to build a path toward a nature and climate-friendly future. The input to the discussion on behalf of the European Landowners Organization was concluded with an appeal for the heated ongoing political debate about nature restoration to calm down: “Let’s be serious!”

If you’d like to join the Pilot Test, visit our website: <https://herit-erasmus.eu/> to learn more! We can’t wait to see you at our final conference May 23rd!

How can start-ups tackle the challenges of natural resources management for sustainable supply chains in agriculture and forestry?

The conference was a pre-event of the Forum for the Future of Agriculture, taking place in Brussels in March 2023.

Sean OSTRUSZKA



Natural resources management can be challenging enough on its own. Doing it sustainably adds a few more levels of difficulty, from the planning, production, and delivery of natural resources to the impact on ecosystems to the innovations needed to optimize our use of natural resources and promote stronger ecosystem services.

Yet, those challenges and more are what a recent online pre-forum session for the Forum of the Future of Agriculture looked to tackle. Bringing together three small-business leaders from the agriculture and forestry industries – Ivo DEGN, CEO and co-founder, Climate Farmers; Georg KOENIG, COO, Kiebitz; and Alexander VILSMEIER, Forestry Expert and Sales, Tree.ly, the webinar, moderated by Marie SCHÖNBORN (YFCS), was a discussion on how different start-ups approach these challenges and positive steps for the future.

Being a farmer, himself, KOENIG acknowledged he has the deepest motivation to make environmental protection a profitable business case for farmers and foresters. The problem is, there's a €700 billion annual funding gap between those who want to rebuild our ecosystems and the money they'd need to do it. That's where his company, Kiebitz, hopes to close that chasm by helping channel private investments into the building up of trustworthy nature capital solutions. At the same time,

they've created an app that helps farmers share pictures of any biodiversity measures they've implemented to help get government subsidies, with more pilot programs in the works all centred around funding environmental improvements throughout Europe.

For VILSMEIER and Tree.ly, it's not a monetary problem they're trying to attack but an awareness issue, saying they're in business to "unlock the full potential of our forests ecologically and emotionally." By connecting societies and companies with data-driven technology and software, they're pushing for a better understanding of forests' impact to drive better forest management. They currently create digital representations of forests, allowing them to accurately show CO2 storage (with future plans to provide biodiversity estimates for things like water, reservoir capacities, etc.). Once the CO2 storage is understood, they bring trading partners, companies and enterprises together with the forest owners to create a collaborative effort.

More funding and awareness are huge efforts towards improving natural resources management, with DEGN and his team at Climate Farmers seeing a scaling interest in things like regenerative agriculture in recent years. Where his company comes in is focusing on building the infrastructure to handle the increased scaling. Often, farmers pioneer these efforts but ultimately

work in silos. By creating networks, communities and conferences, Climate Farmers works with farmers to connect them with other farmers on the same journey. Climate Farmers even takes it a step further in those connections by matching farmers with financing opportunities.

With a direct question to DEGN about subsidies, the CEO acknowledged there are skeptics who feel the regenerative agriculture business model is not sustainable unless there's a subsidy. Fortunately, its increased usage in recent years has created increased data showing it can be sustainable. But the important part is understanding the business model and yield are two separate parts of the equation, and profitability should be the focus.

That led to the idea of how we're going to be perceiving the role of farmers in society in the future. According to KOENIG, regenerative agriculture will "put the farmer at the center of attention," as it puts value creation back to the farms not needing to buy as much fertilizers and other products they needed in the past. Then it's a matter of seeing their increased value (and subsequent increase in pay) not just from yield but environmental impact at the societal level.

VILSMEIER completely agreed with his fellow entrepreneurs, but then posed his own question: Is it possible to combine subsidies and public funding with afforestation with the project? He acknowledged it's possible, but that it's a cumbersome process, and ultimately, he believes it's through innovations and not subsidies that a true impact will be made in this space.

The recording of the discussion is available on the Forum's website: www.forumforag.com

The Future Forest Initiative: Fostering the development of innovative solutions for the forests

The conference was a pre-event of the Forum for the Future of Agriculture, a prime European meeting place for organizations interested in agriculture, food security and environmental health.

Christoph zu STOLBERG, Head of International Relations, Future Forest Initiative



Humberto DELGADO ROSA

The *Future Forest Initiative* (FFI), first *Innovation Hub for Forests and Climate* in Europe, organized its first conference in Brussels on March 27. The platform aims to foster the development of innovative and sustainable solutions for the forest in times of climate change.

Created in 2022 in Blankenburg (Harz), Germany, the European Innovation Hub combines the innovative power of startups, scientific know-how and empirical values of the established economy from all over Europe. It supports entrepreneurs in the development of their solutions, until they hit the market. International participative events such as the yearly *Future Forest Forum* and the first startup accelerator for forests in Europe are two key elements of the support provided by the FFI. An investment fund for startups and an institute converging different specialties to ease the development of new projects are under construction.

The conference in Brussels was made possible by the support of the *Landwirtschaftliche Rentenbank*, a strong partner of the FFI since its very beginning. Caspar von ALVENSLEBEN, Officer for Innovation and Strategy in Agriculture and Forestry at the bank, explained in his opening speech the role of the institution as a financial and advisory supporter for agribusinesses and rural areas in Germany. Besides promoting agriculture and forestry, as well as the entire food

value chain, the bank also supports renewable energies and the bioeconomy. Rentenbank is the first development bank for rural areas in Germany.

Humberto DELGADO ROSA, Director for Biodiversity at DG Environment, held the keynote speech and exposed the views and objectives of the European Commission with regard to a new uniform frame it is building for the Member States. It will allow them to monitor the health of their forests in a consistent manner. Copernicus could be used to automatize that surveillance. The new *EU Framework for Forest Monitoring and Strategic Plans* could also allow a new income for landowners thanks to a rewarding (monetization) strategy to support/enhance nature's ecosystem services. To illustrate the potential, Mr. ROSA recalled that the investment of €1 into nature restoration brings €8 of benefits through an improvement of the ecosystem services.

To stress the need for practical innovative solutions in the forest sector, Gabriel von dem BUSSCHE discussed the situation of his family estate. He explained the crisis private landowners face due to the effects of climate change on their land. Gabriel, a solution-driven entrepreneur, decided to look at the benefits of new methods and technologies developed by startups to replant, manage, and adapt forests. He therefore joined the FFI-Community.

The conference ended with three startups from the FFI-Community giving practical examples of innovative solutions that

support landowners and the forest: Breeze Technologies developed an early warning system for forest fires. Tree.ly offers a platform that generates carbon credits from forest reforestation projects in Europe and Live EO offers an automated land monitoring system by satellite surveillance supported by artificial intelligence.

The participants were delighted with the dynamic felt during the conference. This positive "maker-spirit" is typical of the FFI-events, attracting a crowd which is solution-driven.

The conference was a pre-event of the *Forum for the Future of Agriculture*. The FFI was thankful for the opportunity offered by the European Landowner's Organization (ELO) to present its structure and objectives, as well as a few of the startups it supports. The FFI is now looking forward to the second edition on the 25th of March 2024, to present many other innovative solutions for the forests.

The next large FFI-event will be its forum on the **8th and 9th of September 2023 at Blankenburg Castle (Harz) in Germany**. There, startups will pitch their practical solutions and the 300+ participants will receive the opportunity to present their own challenges and projects in workshops. Also, it is the ideal place to find partners and financing, as well as meet forest owners and scientists. The forum is open to everyone interested in forests. The tickets for early birds are already available: www.futureforest.de/future-forest-forum



Dr. Benjamin KOWALSKI and Franziska HILLMER, FFI

Empowering European Landowners: SOILGUARD's Mission to Preserve Soil Biodiversity

In today's rapidly changing world, preserving soil biodiversity is paramount for biogeographical regions' environmental, economic, and social well-being. Unsustainable land management practices and the impacts of climate change pose significant threats to soil biodiversity and the intricate ecosystems it supports. Recognising the urgency of this issue, our pioneering initiative, SOILGUARD, has emerged with a mission to bridge critical knowledge gaps, promote sustainable soil management, and establish soil biodiversity as a nature-based solution to combat land degradation and climate change.

SOILGUARD

Arlette UFITINEMA BIREKERAHO, ELO



© Helle Hestbjerg

Helle HESTBJERG (DTI) working on the WP3 shelter, setting up the pilot test with heaters in Denmark.

At the heart of our mission is the need to address knowledge gaps related to biodiversity and the invaluable role of soil in supporting human well-being. To achieve this, we are collaborating to develop the Soil Biodiversity and Well-being Framework, a conceptual and analytical framework with the potential to become the global standard for future soil biodiversity assessments. We will validate the effectiveness of this framework through comprehensive experimental designs encompassing diverse biomes, land degradation gradients, and in-situ climate change simulations.

We understand the power of sharing co-created knowledge and are developing the groundbreaking SOILGUARDIANS app as a central hub for knowledge exchange. This app establishes causal links between soil biodiversity, multifunctionality, and overall well-being, empowering stakeholders to transition to sustainable land management practices. By fostering an ecosystem of innovation and collaboration, the SOILGUARDIANS app will provide landowners with the tools to showcase, learn from, and share their experiences.

We are building a knowledge and collaboration network through the SOILGUARD Network of Knowledge (SNoK) to amplify our impact further. This network brings together a diverse community of experts, researchers, and practitioners who provide valuable insights and support to landowners in their efforts towards soil biodiversity conserva-

tion. The collaboration between the SNoK and the SOILGUARDIANS app creates a dynamic platform for co-creation, knowledge exchange, and collective learning.

Our vision extends beyond individual actions; we aim to influence policies and frameworks at the EU and international levels. By co-creating evidence-based conservation recommendations, we contribute to developing effective strategies for preserving soil biodiversity. Additionally, we actively support Member States' commitments under the Global Soil Partnership, ensuring that the importance of soil biodiversity is recognised and addressed globally.

The SOILGUARD project has achieved exciting progress in establishing a cross-biome network of sites. We have sampled 234 sites, including cropland, grassland, and forest sites, across various regions successfully. Furthermore, as part of our project's climate change simulations, our team



© Jorge Mataix-Solera

Ground shot from the simulation site in Spain.

conducted climate projections for Belgium (Atlantic), Denmark (continental), Finland (Boreal), Hungary (Pannonian), Ireland (Atlantic), Latvia (Boreal), and Spain (Mediterranean). Quantifying degradation levels and creating maps have been crucial, and data analysis is already underway, providing valuable insights into soil biodiversity.

In the project's third year, we aim to assess the impact of climate change and management practices on soil biodiversity. We will analyse the effect of drought and heatwaves on the biodiversity of different soil biota groups across differently managed systems. Additionally, we will explore the links between soil biodiversity and soil functions by collecting, analysing, and correlating functional parameters from 2022 and 2023 with biodiversity data.

Our pioneering efforts in addressing knowledge gaps, promoting sustainable soil management, and advocating for soil biodiversity conservation are vital steps towards a sustainable future. Through developing a comprehensive framework for soil biodiversity assessment, utilising the innovative SOILGUARDIANS app, and establishing a robust network of experts, we empower European landowners to become guardians of soil biodiversity. Together, we can pave the way for sustainable land management practices, preserve soil biodiversity, and secure our lands' long-term health for the benefit of future generations.

To stay informed about the latest developments in the SOILGUARD project, interested individuals can contact Lindsey CHUBB at projects@elo.org or Arlette BIREKERAHO at arlette.birekeraho@elo.org. You can also follow SOILGUARD on social media for updates.

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HERIT Project Final Conference

Daniel MONTELEONE, ELO



On May 23rd, European Historic Houses, with where we had visitors from across Europe meet to learn about the project. The discussion opened with warm welcomes from our esteemed guests, Alfonso PALLAVICINI, President of EHH and Emmanuelle MIKOSZ, Director of European Affairs at ELO. Following this, Daniel MONTELEONE, coordinator for the project, introduced Laura NIETO, a Professor from the University of A Coruna. She explained in detail all the features of the MOOC, as well as feedback and how it has been improved since the Pilot Testing just a few months ago.

A roundtable with Joaquin MENCOS and Kathrine BOAS PEDERSEN, two participants from the pilot program, as well as Katerina SOSTOK and Gabriel WICK, experts in the topics of Historic Houses took place after a QA and lively opening debate. Each participant gave a deep and meaningful explanation of their experiences with the MOOC and how it will help them develop their own plans.

Following another Q & A session and a networking break, a second panel was hosted by Dana BELDIMAN. Panelists included Marzia PICCININNO, Stefania PIGNATELLI GLADSTONE, and Małgorzata KOZAK from the European Commission. The conference ended with congratulations to everyone involved, including a special thank you to Ewelina OKSIUTA, Theodora CANCIU, and Laura NIETO for their additional contributions to the success of the project.

The learning continued with an EHH Educational Workshop on Generative AI and Social Media Storytelling for Cultural Heritage. During the workshop, participants engaged in three different thematic hands-on workshops, crafting beautiful and original stories and made their venues more instagrammable. Finally, EHH hosted

a networking dinner at the location, where participants from all across Europe had delicious meals and even better conversations.

In other news, we are excited to announce that the HERIT MOOC, the culmination of years of effort by the project partners, has been officially made available to EVERYBODY! The pilot testing, mentioned in a previous issue of this magazine had well over 100 registrations, with 66 participants completing the course within the short testing period, many of whom were ELO members invited to join this prestigious first class.



Now, the course is open to everyone with no deadlines! If you want to take the entire 12-20 hour course in 1 weekend, you can! If you would like to spread out the work with 1 hour a week, you're more than welcome to. This course is aimed at anyone interested in the heritage of historic houses, including professionals from the public or private sector, owners, and managers of historic houses who want to drive an innovative change for improvement in their houses or those who want to open their house to the public in the future. It includes video testimonials, voluntary activities and the chance to get a certificate of completion!

If you would like to remain involved after the project, visit our website, follow us on Twitter or contact Daniel directly at Daniel.Montealeone@elo.org.

<https://herit-erasmus.eu/>

@ErasmusHerit



HERIT organisational Team

Let's increase our food supply
without
reducing theirs

the good growth plan

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ARE YOU PROTECTING POLLINATORS?



 *European
Bee Award*

3 PRIZES

Land Management
practices (€ 4,000)

Innovative
technological
solutions (€ 4,000)

Special mention of
the Jury (Diploma of
recognition)

Are you involved in any innovative initiatives aimed at protecting bees or other pollinators?

The **European Bee Award** is launching the call for applications for 2023! The European Landowners' Organization (ELO) and the European Agricultural Machinery Industry Association (CEMA) invite you to submit your project by **Friday, September 8, 2023**.

Since 2014, the Bee Award is committed to find common solutions for the benefit of biodiversity by rewarding projects protecting pollinators.

3 prizes will be awarded:

- Land Management practices (€ 4,000 prize)
- Innovative technological solutions (€ 4,000 prize)
- Special Mention of the Jury (diploma of recognition)

Who can apply?

The European Bee Award is open to everyone*.

We reward farmers, landowners, research institutes, academia, and private and public organisations who develop **outstanding and innovative projects aiming to protect bees or other pollinators** and helping to preserve biodiversity. Former applicants are very welcome to re-apply!

*Check the terms and conditions in the application form

DOWNLOAD THE APPLICATION FORM online and send it back to us by email at anne-sophie.mulier@elo.org
<https://www.europeanlandowners.org/awards/bee-award>

We are looking forward to receive your application and discover all the amazing projects protecting the bees all around Europe. Feel free to reach us or send this fantastic opportunity to your network.

The Bee Award Team

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European Landowners' Organization

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