




ELO^o

European Landowners' Organization



Manifesto European Elections 2024

Managing Europe's land for the Future



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

The European Landowners' Organization (ELO) is a unique federation of associations from Europe, dedicated to representing the interests of landowners, land managers, and rural entrepreneurs.

Located in Brussels, ELO stands as an independent non-governmental organisation providing support to its members on a range of countryside-related policies. These encompass land management, agriculture, forestry, environment, land conservation, land access, and property rights.

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

ELO calls on the EU to face Climate Change by:

Reviving EU's agenda on Green growth and decarbonisation

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

Supporting proactive land-based action for climate change adaptation

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

Supporting a market-based reward system for carbon removals

Land based sectors play a pivotal role in meeting the ambitious 2030 target of 310 million CO₂ eq carbon removals. This target must be accompanied by the proper market signals. ELO is dedicated to supporting methodologies that minimise the administrative burden for land managers, recognise pioneers, accurately calculate baselines, and address permanence in a realistic manner. Those methodologies should also consider the specific activities and environmental conditions of each region. The sooner the framework allows for a boost in the market of carbon removals, the sooner the targets can be met.

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



1

Not jeopardising food security

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

2

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

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

3

Recognising the EU's multifunctional forestry sector

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

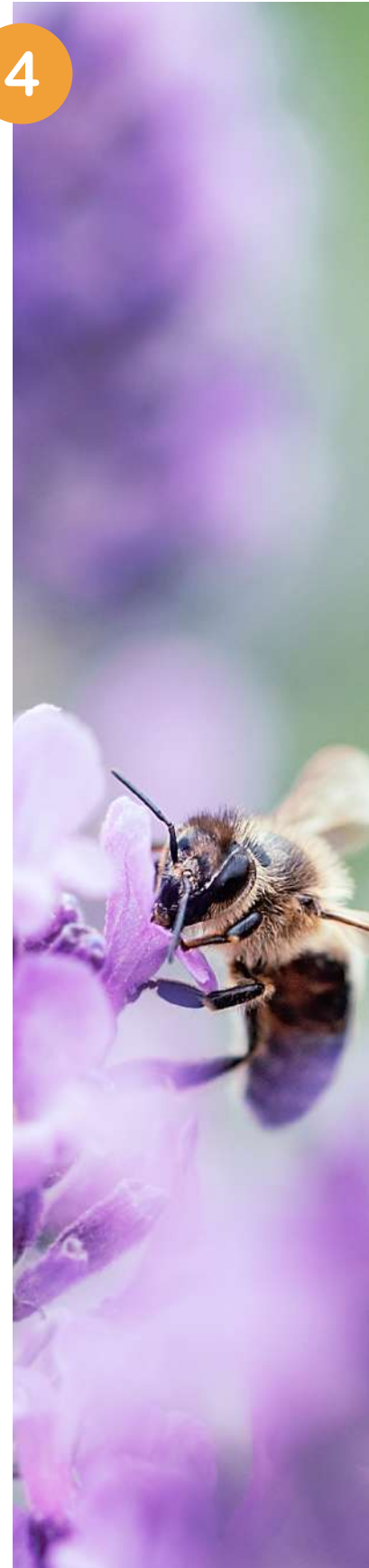
ELO calls on the EU to push a strategic autonomy agenda that includes land-based sectors by:

Keeping pace with agri technology and innovation

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

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

4



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



1

Managing Europe's ecosystems for the future

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

2

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

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

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

Focusing on the incentives for nature restoration and other biodiversity targets

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

Promoting private conservation

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

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



5

Promoting initiatives on soil health

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

6

Managing Water

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

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

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



1

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

The Common Agricultural Policy is vital in guaranteeing a competitive agricultural sector, contributing to Sustainable Forest Management and in supporting rural areas. It is not an easy task in face of budget pressures and increasingly challenging circumstances. Agriculture is the main sector under the responsibility of the EU, it requires policy-makers to take their responsibility seriously. While the new reform is still in the initial phases of implementation, it is important to follow its development and track the delivery of its numerous strategic objectives, while allowing for corrections and innovation.

2

Considering the specificities and needs of rural businesses

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

3

Future-proofing our rural areas

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

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

Securing platforms for dialogue

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

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

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

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

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

4



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



1

Using data to boost innovation

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

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

2

Ensuring privacy of rural business data

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

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



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For more information on the ELO Manifesto 2024 contact:

Delphine Dupeux, Director of Parliament Relations Intergroup

Ana Rocha, Director of EU's Agri & Forestry-Related Policies

delphine.dupeux@elo.org

ana.rocha@elo.org


European Landowners' Organization - ELO

Rue de Trèves 67,

B - 1040 Brussels

T: + 32 (0) 2 234 30 00

www.elo.org

 /europeanlandowners

 /EULandownersOrg

 /european-landowners'-organization

 /europeanlandowners