Innovators by Nature: be part of the future of nature-driven innovations

On 3 December 2025, the European Landowners' Organization and the Friends of the Countryside hosted *Innovators by Nature*, a full-day event, showcasing innovative business models to an audience of landowners, farmers, foresters, entrepreneurs and policymakers from all over Europe.

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How Europe's landowners are shaping a nature-positive economy

The event was a welcome addition to the policy-driven conferences that are the default events in the Brussels EU bubble. Here, the policy framework was present as just that, a framework. But the focus was the reality on the ground. Across eight thematic sessions innovative companies, practitioners, and organisations presented concrete and sustainable solutions, showcasing how landowners and managers can work with nature to support new revenue streams and accelerate sustainable practices.

It was an important demonstration of how policy ambition can translate into real-world applications, showcasing practical tools, projects, and investment pathways already being deployed across Europe's landscapes. For Europe's private landowners, the message is clear: innovation is no longer optional, it is becoming central to long-term resilience, whether economic or environmental, and the event demonstrated that they work hand in hand.

At a time of climate uncertainty, biodiversity loss, evolving regulations, and shifting markets, the event offered a powerful *counter-narrative*

Rather than being constrained by change, landowners are increasingly engaging with new approaches, exploring nature-based solutions, and evaluating models that combine environmental ambition with economic viability.

The event highlighted how collaboration between innovators and land managers is key to moving from ideas to implementation, combining technological innovation, nature-based approaches, and long-term stewardship to deliver practical outcomes across farms, forests, and estates. Throughout the day, it became obvious that only this partnership can turn rural challenges into opportunities, building resilience while delivering measurable benefits for biodiversity, climate, and communities.

Across eight thematic sessions, biodiversity, integrated pest management, forestry, sustainable energy, estate-driven innovation, financing carbon & nature, agroforestry, and regenerative agriculture, a clear message emerged: **Europe's countryside is not waiting for transformation, it is driving it.** Through creativity, collaboration, and long-term stewardship, landowners and innovators together are proving that productive landscapes can also be nature-positive, innovative, and financially robust.

Biodiversity: a strategic asset

The biodiversity session showed how landowners can move from conservation projects to finance-ready outcomes. CreditNature presented a structured pathway for turning rewilding and restoration into measurable assets. Their approach begins with assessing land condition and management practices, followed by tracking ecological improvement through a science-backed framework. This enables landowners to quantify biodiversity uplift and convert it into verified Nature Credits, directly linking on-the-ground action to investment flows. A detailed case study illustrated how restoring wetlands, introducing natural grazing, and increasing habitat complexity can significantly improve ecosystem scores over time, creating a pipeline of credits that generate income as restoration milestones are achieved. Crucially for estates, capital can be released progressively as delivery is verified, helping fund restoration without requiring large upfront investment.

Syngenta followed with a practical farming perspective, demonstrating how biodiversity can be integrated into productive landscapes at scale. Its Operation Pollinator programme has already supported more than eight million hectares globally through flower margins and habitat strips that boost pollinators, beneficial insects, and farmland birds. Scientific evidence presented during the session showed consistent increases in insect abundance and ecosystem services such as pollination and natural pest control, translating into healthier crops, improved yields, and stronger resilience. Digital tools such as Cropwise Sustainability now allow growers to self-assess biodiversity performance, benchmark results, and plan restoration actions directly from mobile devices. The message for landowners was clear: biodiversity enhancement does not require taking land

out of production. Targeted interventions at field margins and landscape scale can deliver measurable gains while supporting farm profitability.

Carmeuse brought a striking example from extractive landscapes, showing how active quarries can be managed dynamically to create temporary and permanent habitats supporting pioneer species such as sand martins, natterjack toads, and eagle owls. Through its *Life in Quarries* approach, restoration is integrated directly into operations using ponds, cliffs, hedgerows, and wetlands. Perhaps most relevant for rural estates were the lessons learned that effective biodiversity outcomes do not always require costly investments, but they do depend on long-term commitment, expert partnerships, pragmatic monitoring, and strong stakeholder communication.

The session concluded with RISE Foundation's presentation on developing a high-integrity Nature Credit pathway tailored to private land conservation. Their model focuses on clear baselines, measurable ecological uplift, scalable monitoring, and strong governance, enabling landowners to monetise verified biodiversity improvements while gaining formal recognition for stewardship.

Across all presentations, shared themes emerged: measurement matters, restoration can pay, working landscapes count, and finance is coming, but alignment between projects and policy is still needed. Biodiversity is no longer just an environmental responsibility. With the right tools and frameworks, it is becoming a strategic opportunity for rural estates.

Integrated Pest Management: restoring balance while protecting productivity

The Integrated Pest Management (IPM) session demonstrated how nature-based crop protection is moving from niche practice to mainstream strategy, with or without the use of conventional products. IBMA presented IPM as an ecosystem-based system built around prevention, monitoring, biological control, resistant varieties, and precision intervention. Evidence showed that IPM can deliver both short-term agronomic benefits and long-term resilience, yet adoption across Europe remains far below what science supports. International examples illustrated what becomes possible when innovation and policy align: in Brazil, biological control is now used on roughly 60% of agricultural land.

Field trials by FytoFend from grapes and potato systems showed that plant defence activators and biological solutions can achieve high efficacy while reducing chemical inputs. In some cases, growers reported reduced residues, lower environmental impact, and increased profitability.

Sumitomo Chemical added a regenerative perspective, showing how biological solutions are helping landowners link IPM with soil health. By combining practices such as cover crops and reduced tillage with microbial tools like mycorrhizae and natural pest-control organisms, they demonstrated how farms can improve nutrient efficiency, reduce chemical inputs, and build resilience, highlighting the growing convergence between regenerative agriculture and IPM.

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For landowners, the message was practical and empowering: IPM is not a single product but a system, one that strengthens farm resilience, aligns with evolving regulation, and supports biodiversity while maintaining yields, and often reducing input costs.

Forestry: building resilient forests and investable landscapes

Forests deliver immense environmental value, from carbon storage to biodiversity, and from water regulation to soil stability, and risk buffering. Yet much of this remains invisible to markets. The forestry session focused on how unified metrics could unlock new revenue streams while reducing administrative burden.

The Future Forest Initiative highlighted the need for unified nature metrics that allow forest owners to access emerging biodiversity, carbon markets and improve resilience. Their presentation stressed a stark reality: without healthy forests, everything built on top of them becomes unproductive, unstable, and increasingly uninsurable. To address this, they proposed a shared "Nature Intelligence Infrastructure" for Europe's forests, a common measurement backbone that would enable landowners to measure once and report everywhere. Such a framework would turn forest condition data in trusted assets, usable across biodiversity credits, water markets, risk models, and outcome-based management contracts.

Land Life brought a ground-level perspective, showcasing large-scale restoration across the Iberian Peninsula, where more than five million native trees have been planted since 2018. Using precision planting, remote sensing, AI-supported monitoring, and autonomous seeding systems, projects are designed around native species and local conditions to ensure long-term resilience to drought, heatwaves, and fire. Innovative finance models were also presented, allowing corporate funders to support restoration upfront in exchange for future environmental outcomes such as carbon credits, while landowners retain stewardship and long-term benefits.

Forests emerged not just as ecological infrastructure, but as emerging economic infrastructure.

Sustainable energy: producing food and power on the same land

The sustainable energy session explored how rural landscapes can contribute to decarbonisation, while contributing to the financial resilience for the rural entrepreneur.

Corteva Agriscience presented a model for producing sustainable fuel using short-season sunflower as an intermediate crop between winter cereals, effectively enabling three crops in two years. Beyond generating additional income, the system improves soil structure, organic matter, and biodiversity.

Nufarm presented *carinata* as a sustainable intermediate oilseed crop that can be grown between main food crops to produce certified feedstock for fuel. As a non-food, deep-rooted crop, carinata improves soil structure, supports biodiversity, enhances nutrient efficiency, and contributes to soil carbon sequestration, while generating additional farm income.

ILOS then illustrated how solar installations can coexist with agriculture through elevated or vertical panels that preserve machinery access, reduce soil overheating, improve water efficiency, and in many cases enhance crop performance under stress. Advanced systems integrate AI-guided machinery, autonomous robots, and precision irrigation.

For landowners, agrivoltaics offers stable energy income alongside continued food production. The conclusion resonated strongly: renewable energy is not about replacing agriculture, it is about strengthening it and complementing in.

Estate-driven innovation: digital tools, biodiversity labels, and estate diversification

The estate-driven innovation session focused on how landowners can modernise operations, strengthen biodiversity credentials, and create new revenue streams, all while preserving landscape integrity. Rather than presenting abstract concepts, speakers shared concrete tools already being deployed across European estates.

Natlink showed how digital platforms are helping estates modernise wildlife and land management, combining GPS tracking, trail cameras, and mobile apps to provide real-time oversight of game populations, safety, predators, and disease. By centralising field data into shared dashboards, landowners can improve coordination, speed up responses to challenges such as swine fever, and demonstrate responsible stewardship, highlighting digitalisation as essential in today's estate management practices.

The Wildlife Estates (WE) Label showcased how biodiversity stewardship can be formally recognised and turned into economic advantage. Coordinated by ELO, the science-based certification scheme assesses habitat conservation, restoration efforts, and sustainable land management across more than two million hectares in 19 countries. Beyond recognition, the label builds investor trust, supports ESG reporting, and opens access to biodiversity finance, helping estates translate good management into measurable natural capital.

Wild Connection presented low-impact tourism as a diversification pathway for estates, offering nature-based experiences such as outdoor activities, local gastronomy, and light glamping that generate income without permanent infrastructure. By focusing on temporary installations and authorised paths, the model allows landowners to create value through cultural and natural heritage while preserving biodiversity and landscape integrity.

Financing nature: bringing ecosystems onto the balance sheet

The financing session marked a turning point, showing how biodiversity, soil, water, and forests are increasingly being treated as financial assets. The Landbanking Group presented its Natural Capital Management System, a digital platform that allows landowners to measure ecosystem performance, monitor land condition, and convert verified improvements into investable outcomes. Through tools such as the Ecosystem Integrity Index, ecological data is translated into financial value, enabling new mechanisms including outcome-linked loans, landscape transition funds, and verified nature units tied to forests, agroforestry, cropland regeneration, and conservation areas. For landowners, this creates a direct pathway from stewardship to revenue: restoration efforts can attract upfront private capital while long-term ownership remains unchanged. Perhaps most significantly, the session highlighted a shifting role for rural land managers. Rather than passive recipients of subsidies, landowners are becoming suppliers of ecosystem services to companies and investors seeking resilience against climate and biodiversity risks. By providing verified environmental data, estates gain access to new funding streams and position themselves at the centre of an emerging NatureFinTech economy, where nature-positive management becomes both a strategic and financial asset.

Agroforestry: measuring biodiversity gains and turning trees into natural capital

The agroforestry session presented the DigitAF Horizon Europe project, highlighting how integrating trees into farmland delivers measurable biodiversity, climate, productivity benefits and how new digital tools are making these gains verifiable and market-ready. Moving beyond advocacy, DigitAF focuses on proving impact, with practical calculators enabling landowners to quantify biodiversity gains, carbon sequestration, and soil health improvements at plot level. Officially recognised under the EU's CAP, agroforestry is increasingly positioned as both an agronomic and financial strategy, with verified outcomes opening access to future nature credits and outcome-based payments. For landowners, the message was clear: trees on farms are becoming measurable natural capital assets in Europe's emerging nature-positive economy.

Regenerative agriculture: making soil health measurable, resilient, and profitable

The regenerative agriculture session demonstrated how soil is becoming a measurable and investable asset, as regenerative practices converge with digital monitoring and outcome-based markets. BASF Agricultural Solutions showed how innovation across crop protection, seeds, biosolutions, and digital platforms such as Xarvio can help farmers reduce disease and greenhouse gas intensity while maintaining, and in some cases increasing, yields. BASF emphasised that resilient farming systems depend on a diverse toolbox combining conventional and biological solutions, advanced genetics, and precision decision-support, warning that regenerative agriculture must be enabled by innovation rather than constrained by regulation.

Downforce Technologies presented satellite-based monitoring systems that allow landowners to track soil organic carbon with high precision across entire properties. Using empirical modelling and ISO-aligned verification, Downforce enables estates to generate certified soil carbon reports, opening access to carbon markets, ESG reporting, and climate finance. Importantly, these insights also deliver immediate agronomic benefits, including improved water retention, reduced erosion, healthier soil biolo-

gy, and greater resilience to drought and extreme weather, reinforcing soil data as a growing component of land value.

Completing the picture, Indigo connected regenerative practices directly to market mechanisms. By combining core practices such as cover crops, reduced tillage, crop rotation, and livestock integration with microbial seed treatments and digital monitoring, Indigo enables farmers to generate soil-based carbon credits and sustainability claims, sold to companies seeking verified environmental outcomes. Indigo shared global results showing millions paid directly to growers, alongside large-scale greenhouse gas reductions and water savings.

Together, the session showed that regenerative agriculture is evolving from a set of practices into a performance-based system, where verified soil improvement unlocks multiple value streams, from higher productivity to climate finance, positioning landowners who adopt early at the forefront of Europe's emerging nature-positive economy.

The countryside at the heart of change

Throughout the day, Innovators by Nature stressed that alignment between policy ambition and practical delivery, environmental goals and economic realities, innovation and long-term stewardship is possible. But we need to support the adoption of these approaches so we can deliver the green transition and mitigate climate change without jeopardising rural livelihoods. Across biodiversity metrics, biological crop protection, forest monitoring, agroforestry tools, renewable energy systems, estate management platforms, and natural capital finance, a coherent picture emerged: **Europe's rural landscapes are becoming measurable, investable, and resilient, while remaining fundamentally productive.**

Climate change, regulatory simplification, and market expectations are reshaping agriculture and forestry at unprecedented speed. Yet the event made clear that landowners are not passive recipients of this transition, they are active partners in delivering Europe's Green Deal objectives, biodiversity targets, and climate commitments. On farms, in forests, and across estates, land managers are already implementing solutions that restore ecosystems, strengthen food security, generate renewable energy, and attract private investment into nature.

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Peter MOSS, Downforce Technologies CEO

The innovators presenting at the conference demonstrated that the tools now exist to move from aspiration to action, and that many of these solutions are already being deployed. Science-based metrics are making biodiversity visible. Regenerative practices and biological solutions are reducing environmental footprints while sustaining yields. Digital platforms are improving transparency and accountability. Emerging finance models are connecting stewardship directly to capital markets. Together, these innovations provide a practical pathway for aligning the CAP, climate policies, and biodiversity strategy with on-the-ground delivery.

The message to policymakers was equally clear: Europe's landowners are ready to lead, but they need coherent frameworks, enabling regulation, and investment conditions that reward outcomes rather than constrain innovation. With the right signals, rural landscapes can become powerful engines of climate mitigation, biodiversity recovery, and economic resilience.

Hectare by hectare, forest by forest, field by field, innovators and landowners are shaping a countryside that delivers food, fibre, energy, biodiversity, and climate resilience, while sustaining rural livelihoods and communities. The nature-positive economy is no longer a distant vision, it is taking shape across Europe's landscapes, built through collaboration between land managers, innovators, investors, and policymakers, and grounded in the knowledge of those who work the land every day.

ORGANISERS

Friends of the Countryside · ELO European Landowners' Organization

KEYNOTE PARTNERS

BASF · CORTEVA agriscience · creditnature · FUTURE FOREST INITIATIVE · IBMA · THE LANDBANKING GROUP · natlink · RISE Foundation Rural investment for a Sustainable Europe

SESSION PARTNERS

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