

# Simplification, responsibility and freedom to act: a moment for Europe's landowners

Across Brussels, the political narrative is shifting. After years of layering new strategies - the European Green Deal, the Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, the Farm to Fork Strategy, the Nature Restoration Regulation - the European institutions are now speaking a new language: *simplification*.

## For Europe's private landowners, this is not a technical footnote. It is a decisive moment

In agriculture, discussions around the future of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) increasingly recognise that excessive reporting requirements, overlapping controls and legal uncertainty are undermining both competitiveness and environmental ambition. Area monitoring systems, pesticide reporting tools, eco-schemes, conditionality rules - each introduced with good intentions - have accumulated into a system that too often prioritises compliance over performance.

In forestry, the implementation of the EU Deforestation Regulation (EUDR), biodiversity targets and carbon accounting frameworks has raised legitimate concerns about proportionality and administrative burden - especially for small and medium-sized forest owners who are already managing sustainably under national frameworks.

In nature conservation, the Nature Restoration Regulation and the 30% protected land target have sparked intense debate. One fact is undeniable: Europe cannot reach its biodiversity objectives without the active engagement of private landowners. Over half of Europe's land is privately managed. No regulation can substitute for the daily stewardship decisions taken on estates, farms and forests.



Dr. Jurgen TACK  
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## This is where simplification becomes essential

Let us be clear: simplification is **not** deregulation. It does not mean abandoning environmental ambition. It means designing rules that are coherent, predictable and workable on the ground. It means reducing duplication between EU and national levels. It means shifting from box-ticking compliance towards measurable outcomes. And above all, it means trusting land managers as partners rather than treating them as suspects.

At ELO, we are advocating for a policy framework that rewards those who *deserve* support - those who invest in biodiversity, soil health, water management and rural employment. We oppose blunt instruments such as arbitrary capping of environmental payments that penalise professional structures and employment-intensive farms. Instead, support should reflect real management efforts and real public goods delivered.

## Simplification must also unlock innovation

Whether through biodiversity credits, carbon markets, precision agriculture or digital monitoring tools, landowners are ready to contribute to Europe's environmental and food security objectives. But innovation requires legal clarity and administrative breathing space.

Friends of the Countryside members are not bystanders in this debate. Through your engagement at national level, your dialogue with Members of the European Parliament, and your participation in initiatives such as the Wildlife Estates Label, you shape the credibility of private stewardship in Brussels.

The coming months - particularly discussions on the next Multiannual Financial Framework and the post-2027 CAP - will determine whether Europe chooses a path of trust-based partnership or continued administrative complexity.