Forum Regional conference visits Ireland prior to Irish Presidency of the EU Council

Liz WILSON

The Forum for the Future of Agriculture's Regional Conference moderated by Rose O'DONOVAN was held on June 2 in Ireland, ahead of the Irish EU Council Presidency starting July 1. It brought together policymakers, farmers, scientists, and investors to debate agri-food transformation, financing the transition, sustainable livestock, and the future of the CAP.

Driving agri-food transformation

MEP Nina CARBERRY called for a standalone CAP with €433 billion in funding, ring-fenced eco-schemes, and flexibility for different farming systems. She warned against European complacency on food security. Mark TITTERINGTON of the ForumforAg struck a dual tone, optimistic about unprecedented public and private capital circling agriculture, but pessimistic about regulatory barriers blocking carbon farming and biological tools. Stewart GEE of Climate KIC expressed frustration at the slow pace of change, citing the complexity of aligning products across national inventories, sustainability programmes, and advisory systems. Martin VOSS of the Oath Group showcased soil microbiome technology, microbial consortia that doubled yields in Rwanda and reduced water needs by 30% in Mediterranean trials.

Financing the transition

Brendan DUNFORD presented the Burren's results-based payment model, framed around "pocket, head and heart" — paying farmers for ecosystem services, providing local advisory support, and giving them ownership of the narrative. Douglas MCMILLAN highlighted peatlands as Ireland's third-largest agricultural emission source, proposing graduated water-table payments and paludiculture to give farmers viable income from rewetted land. Jurgen TACK of ELO criticised slow EU policy development, noting carbon farming organisations in Europe dropped from 550 to 37, and announced ELO's own investment certificate enabling direct private investment in biodiversity, bypassing regulatory delays. Matteo VANZINI of Climate KIC's Place Finance Lab introduced "resilience dividends" — place-based finance combining public, private, and philanthropic capital into single payment structures for farmers.

Sustainable livestock

DG AGRI's Brigitte MISSONE outlined five pillars of the EU livestock strategy due July 7: crisis resilience, competitiveness on quality, sustainability through extensification and precision, territoriality for rural communities, and excellence across all systems. The EEA's Jan-Erik PETERSEN made the biodiversity case for extensive grazing, noting one-third of Habitats Directive habitats depend on traditional grazing across 35 million hectares. IUCN's Blandine CAMUS urged policy coherence across agriculture, diets, biodiversity, and climate. Elaine HOULIHAN, a young farmer from Limerick, gave a candid testimony, her family's suckler herd shrank from 150 to 40, and she cannot see a future in farming without access to land, finance, and policies rewarding environmental public goods.

CAP and European Competitiveness Fund

DG GROW's Albena TANEVA presented the proposed €450 billion European Competitiveness Fund consolidating 14 programmes, with a dedicated agriculture and bioeconomy window. DG AGRI's Ricard RAMON confirmed a minimum €300 billion CAP budget to 2034, with €48 billion for rural areas and a strengthened young farmer package. MEP Barry COWEN closed by demanding food security equal weight with defence, rejecting 20% CAP cuts, and insisting: "The era of asking farmers to do more for less has to end."

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