Sustainable agriculture conference

Welcome address
• Paul Brannen MEP (UK, S&D) Read here
• Giovanni La Via MEP (IT, EPP) Chair of the EP Environment Committee Read here

Welcome address
• Jeremy Wates, Secretary General, European Environmental Bureau (EEB) Read here
• Ariel Brunner, Head of EU Policy, BirdLife Europe Read here
Keynote speech

Phil Hogan, Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development

Agriculture and sustainability within the new Commission

Read Commissioner Hogan's speech

Questions from the audience:

Trees Robijns (BirdLife Europe) asked why NGOs should continue to support taxpayers’ money funding the CAP given the problems facing the environment and the CAP’s failure to deal with them.

Commissioner Hogan said that they are aware of the environmental constraints. He added: “You cannot have economic sustainability without environmental sustainability.” He described the food challenge as “big and complex” and asserted his belief that farmers have great respect for the environment as they work to offer us viable public goods in order to feed the world.

Marie-Catherine Schulz (France Nature Environnement) reminded the Commissioner that although he has previously described economic and environmental sustainability as “two sides of the same coin”, given the poor content of the three CAP greening measures his actions tell a different story. Furthermore, there are significant equivalent measures and exceptions to these measures. France, for example, established a scheme that would allow maize monoculture to be qualified as an equivalent measure to crop diversification. She therefore asked the Commission to justify that decision to declare monoculture equivalent to greening from an agronomic and environmental point of view?

Commissioner Hogan emphasised that the current European Commission has to implement the outcomes of previous negotiations between the Parliament and the Council and that this equivalent measure is one such outcome. He noted the level of opposition to the new CAP, but said that critique should be properly based on the evidence of its implementation. Lastly, he highlighted that the current focus is now on the implementation of the basic regulations, which is being carried out by the Commission services. These kinds of decisions and clarifications are purely implementation work based on the regulations voted by the European Parliament and the Council.

Olga Kikou (Compassion in World Farming) asked how legislation that allows the export of live animals to countries without EU legislation can be deemed sustainable. She added that these animals are subject to ill treatment and live under terrible conditions.

Commissioner Hogan answered that the legislation has already been much improved upon when it comes to animal welfare. He said that while he is personally in favour of live animal exports, EU legislation on animal welfare must be respected.
Margarete Auken MEP (Denmark, Greens/EFA) contested the Commissioner’s assertion that farmers’ role in society automatically makes them environmentalists, stating that almost all greening initiatives are not respected in Denmark. She therefore asked the Commissioner if today’s food production model was an effective way to achieve global food security.

Commissioner Hogan answered that he did not think they could agree on this subject. He added that we need a balance between food security and the fight against climate change.
CHALLENGES TOWARDS 2050

How to meet future global demand for food?
- Olivier Mora, Project Manager AGRI Monde - TERRA, Institut National pour la Recherche Agronomique (INRA)
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Current state of play
The new CAP risks failing to deliver sustainability. What to do next?
- Faustine Defossez, Senior Policy Officer for Agriculture and Bioenergy, European Environmental Bureau (EEB)
  Download presentation

Looking to the Future
4 Danish scenarios for future farming http://fremtidenslandbrug.dk/future-farming
- Christian Ege, Director, Danish Ecological Council
- Alex Dubgaard, Associate Professor, University of Copenhagen
- Tommy Dalgaard, Senior Researcher, University of Aarhus
  Download presentation

Questions
- Abi Bunker, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), questioned the Danish scenarios. She asked: “How are the scenarios (e.g. ‘rewilding’ type scenarios) technically possible amidst highly intensive agriculture?”
- Samuel Feret, ARC 2020, asked whether the 2030 job creation scenario was specific to Danish agriculture due to its intensity. His second question focused on public support: “What is the rationale behind keeping direct payments in your scenarios?”
- Xavier Poux, European Forum on Nature Conservation and Pastoralism (EFNCP), asked Danish scientists if they have considered the impacts on global society and on health as there could be justification for such a wider project.

Answers
The questions were answered by the four experts that presented the Danish scenarios. They think that these scenarios are technically possible even with highly intensive agriculture. With these scenarios Denmark has more land dedicated for nature and on arable land they use advanced technology to respect the environment. For example, manure will be spread according to the vulnerability of the soil, and good techniques will be used in order to reduce ammonia emissions, such as acidification of manure, and spreading via shoes and hoses.

Regarding the question on direct payments and whether or not they should be maintained, they only covered Pillar 2 in their presentation. Their point was that the surplus costs of the scenarios could be financed by transferring money from Pillar 1 to 2, and within the total CAP-budget on the way towards 2050 – even if the reduction of the budget now adopted will be continued.

Regarding the consequences on health, they did consider health impacts but more on a global scale. In particular, regarding air pollution, the large opportunity for ammonia reduction will be a big progress for health.

Concerning the job creation opportunities, the decrease in jobs is small in three of the scenarios, compared to ‘business as usual’, where you see a decrease because of structural changes. There is a reduction in the three scenarios because of fewer animals, but an increase because of energy production, nature maintenance etc. In the fourth scenario (the biobased one) there is no reduction of jobs at all. They assumed that, even if a green technical development takes time, it is possible.

They lastly made a remark asking what “food production security” is. They recalled that there are different estimates about amounts of food available. The growing population in developing countries requires development of a sustainable and productive agriculture in the countries themselves.
Visions and strategies for sustainable agriculture post 2020

- Jan Plagge, Chair of Farmers Group, International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM)
- Guy Smith, Vice President, National Farmers Union (NFU), UK
- Ursula Hudson, President, Slow Food Germany
- Nina Renshaw, Secretary General, European Public Health Alliance (EPHA)
- Abi Bunker, Head of Agriculture Policy, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) – BirdLife’s UK partner

Panel statements

Jan Plagge started his presentation by saying that as an organic farmer he can see the real impact of CAP implementation. The greening concept failed according to the aims of organic farmers, they are looking forward to the 2017 assessment in view of the policy post-2020. Under the current framework, there are not enough advantages for conventional farmers to turn to organic. One key reason is the CAP framework. IFOAM EU considers that there must be a more progressive approach that puts greater recognition on public good delivery without pillars. That means we have to ask what value can we put on public goods? If there is a value for public goods, then many more farmers will decide to move their farm system to a more sustainable approach.

For that we need a new calculation scheme (e.g. considering market price vs. lost income), a new support model, since the pillar concept does not integrate a value for public goods and hence doesn’t deliver. This model would potentially give a value for clean water or for higher biodiversity. Farmers would easily change the system on arable land, grassland if they get enough money for it. The money is already in the system, still 80% of the money is spread by a “watering can approach”. IFOAM EU considers that we need to design a new approach where the foundation of all payment calculations paid to farmers is based on public money for public goods and supported on a progressive basis in terms of a farming system’s sustainability delivery. The conventional farmers fear that direct payments will end. But the real fear is, that the whole CAP budget will lose money for all farmers, if they don’t deliver enough public goods.

Guy Smith highlighted that the UK has lost half of its farmers. He said that the farm policy is to produce the model 4 (Danish scenario on “rich nature”). However, the best solution to environmental problems is to include farmers in the conversations, not the politicians. He encouraged everyone to support the farmers to monitor biodiversity on their land, and monitor the evolution. “Farmers must take the targets seriously; they must understand it for their benefit; farmers need comprehensive publications,” he said. He underlined that we need to encourage farmers to do more when we see good things, not to blame them. He added that if the legislation is too hard, agriculture will be relocated outside the EU.

Ursula Hudson started by asking whether we want to eat food that comes from a bad or a good farming system. She highlighted that farmers have learnt that they produce for big markets and not for people. This creates a gap between consumers and farmers. She believes that the wording “feeding the world” is out of touch. Indeed, the world can feed itself if we produce enough food, but the real problem is accessibility to food. She added that an EU common sustainable food policy must be created since we can’t rely on current policies.

We need a better, clearer and more sustainable food system, where food, environment and people come first.

Nina Renshaw claimed that we need a sustainable food production system that is good for public health. A clear link must be made between agriculture, food and health. She felt that a question directed to her about whether we “want the EU to starve” was insulting - a very flippant response to the clear need to improve EU agriculture policy so that it better serves the public interest.

It showed that the issue of the public health impacts of agriculture policy is not tackled seriously. She took the example of the school schemes as the only explicit measure within the CAP designed to bring public health benefits, but it represents just 0.25% of the total budget. The school fruit scheme is a success, but the Commission is considering scrapping it for the sake of ‘Better Regulation’. She highlighted that two-thirds of the MS are not meeting minimum guidelines on consumption of fruit and vegetables for healthy diets and that fruit and
vegetable consumption has fallen recently and has been replaced by cheaper processed foods, particularly in countries hardest hit by the economic crisis. But 25MS have adopted the school fruit scheme in order to improve the diets of children. This scheme is popular with schools and parents. She thinks that we should ask ourselves: “What more can agriculture do for our health?”

She drew attention to the fact that our health is at stake if we don’t tackle food quality issues, and she took the example of obesity. She added that four out of five cases of chronic diseases caused by diets, such as type-2 diabetes and cardio-vascular diseases are avoidable if we eat healthily. A few issues must be urgently tackled, according to her, such as harm caused by alcohol consumption, reducing antibiotic overuse in livestock and climate change - which will also have severe public health impacts.

For example, malarial zones are increasing due to climate change. UN FAO studies show that 30% of the greenhouse gas emissions from livestock rearing can be reduced through technological measures, but far more than that is needed, including measures which encourage less meat consumption, which would in itself be beneficial to health. She called for the next generation of food policy to properly take into account protection and improvement of our health.

Abi Bunker talked about the RSPB and its programme of work on agriculture (influencing policy in the UK and EU, their work directly helping farmers and land managers, and projects to help recover biodiversity on farmland) as well as about being a farmer and land manager across a significant UK estate. She started by providing the RSPB’s vision for the future: nature is being restored and is enriching peoples’ lives. We have a world that guarantees clean air and water to future generations, a stable climate, rich and varied wildlife and a robust and sustainable economy. Farming and land management are clearly key to achieving that vision, given the decline in biodiversity and other environmental challenges across Europe. Is CAP doing the job it should and could to drive the change needed? Multiple studies from the UK and across Europe say very clearly that it isn’t. The RSPB and other environmental and conservation NGOs are not the only ones who can see this.

She quoted Matthew Naylor, a UK farmer who also writes in Farmers Weekly: “[The CAP] is like one of those grotesque Hollywood celebrities who have had so much cosmetic surgery that the plastic surgeon has stopped taking things seriously and is playing for laughs. You are left with something resembling a bum with facial features drawn on using mascara and lipstick.”

Some (a few) progressive farmers are aware of and publicly acknowledge their responsibilities to society and the environment, particularly given the funding they receive from the public purse. She said that a technical vision for the CAP is not what is needed now, what we need now is leadership and courage – from civil society, from politicians, from progressive farmers, from academics and economists - to expose these inequities and lost opportunities to the public gaze, to create greater political will and action to what we could all gain if we secure the kind of reform of the CAP which is tackling the big environmental and social challenges we face now, not those of the 1950s. We must understand that the challenge is not to increase food production but it is to produce differently. She thinks that we need to re-politicize food and farming policy. Lasty she called for the issues raised at this conference to be brought to wider public attention.

Questions

Faustine Defossez (EEB) congratulated the panellists for their remarks and highlighted that it was important to make the link between health and agriculture and that food security is not only about how much we produce but how well we do so. She asked Jan Plagge about the “no more pillars” CAP post-2020 approach he talked about; she wondered which criteria the payments would then be based on - would it be a results-based approach? She also challenged Guy Smith on his remarks concerning the complexity of the new policy and the need for simplification, she indeed reminded him that if the policy is so complicated right now it is partially due to the farming lobby and the member states which pushed very hard to get a lot of flexibility on the final texts and hence contributed to the adoption of a complex policy. When it comes to food security she asked why COPA COGECA (that NFU is
part of) is so in favour of biofuels and in particular food-based biofuels that put so much pressure on land worldwide and as a result threaten food production capacity.

**Samuel Feret (Arc 2020)** said that since some people are in favour of a Food policy in the conference audience, he would like to let them know that Arc 2020 has proposed a road map to switch towards a food policy. He highlighted that the main political outcome of the CAP reform was that it gave Member States greater flexibility. Hence, it is very important to have a midterm review report for all the greening measures not just EFAs. He made it clear that it is important for civil society to monitor such CAP reform. Arc 2020 has proposed such monitoring because civil society has a responsibility (2020 platform).

**COPA COGEC**A clearly stated that there are very different approaches concerning the policies, hence they translate this contrast. The approach in Europe is different from the other parts in the world. They wondered how restructuring would work for small farms. At what rate, the project/scenarios of Denmark are feasible, and at what costs? COPA-COGECA agreed that education is key because we are not helping the environment through measures that after all are not implemented. The COPA COGECA representative also had a question to Nina Renshaw, saying that he was disappointed by her criticisms of farmers, challenging her remark that things go wrong because of the CAP. He asked her if she thought that nutrition in the EU will be better without the CAP. He also challenged her about the fact that the CAP supposedly does nothing about health. He asked for a comparison between the EU and other parts of the world, with the under-developed countries, on that issue. Lastly he said that with no CAP we would have to eat food from somewhere else.

**Answers**

**Jan Plagge** replied that if we want to change food and agriculture systems we have to find a balanced approach between not blaming farmers versus not changing. He added that it is hard to change as a farmer; and that it is harder when you have someone, not a farmer, telling you what to do. He said that farmers had to admit that they have a problem with citizen confidence, etc. However, farmers’ objective is to survive economically within markets. He recommended that we find a good balance between environment and economy. He is sure that farmers will change their systems if the policies are designed for this purpose. Even conventional farmers see the benefit of changing towards a more sustainable and environmentally friendly agriculture e.g. not using herbicides for better biodiversity.

**Guy Smith** said that combining agriculture with biodiversity management was a win-win approach. He believes that while we must promote mixed farming we must also be cautious when it comes to the tension within society between producing food or energy.

**Ursula Hudson** took Berlin as an example (demonstration “Wir haben es satt” taking place next to the German green week in January each year) to show a time when farmers and consumers demonstrate together to show that there shouldn’t be a division. Food policy should be designed coherently. She ended by saying that we need to bring together food policy as a coherent system though education.

**Nina Renshaw** replied by saying that we do indeed have food safety policies in Europe. But the CAP itself fails to take into account longer term public health impacts, relating to nutrition, unhealthy foods and alcohol, for example. Concerning a comment on multipurpose potatoes she replied that some agricultural products have clear negative health impacts, the most obvious being tobacco and alcohol but also sugar and high-fat products. Yet harmful impacts are not taken into account in the policy or subsidies. She pointed out that information to consumers is really important. She added that if we have a CAP that is so important for agriculture and there is no food production without that policy and the subsidies, then the public has a right to demand a good and healthy return for their public money.

**Abi Bunker** said that, regarding the amount of money attached to the CAP, we should think as citizens about what we want from it because this is public money and not farmers money, it needs to promote public goods. The question around health is perfectly legitimate.
Concluding remarks

- Margrete Auken MEP (Denmark, Greens/EFA)
- Christian Ege, Director, Danish Ecological Council

Margrete Auken reminded us about a debate in the 70s on pesticides that was controversial; today we have the knowledge (on biodiversity, health) that helps us to have clearer ideas. She said that the new Commission is a disaster for the environment as they have an old-fashioned way of thinking. She took the plastic bags issue as an example. She said that they have been discussing with farmers, but that it is hard to criticise them because they are always perceived as ‘victims’. She said that as long as we don’t change the whole approach it will be difficult. She added that we need people mobilising politicians and national parties.

She highlighted that the good ideas that are developed should be promoted, such as the Danish system.

She made the point that finance ministers cannot calculate environmental value.

She finished saying that we know what to do about organic farming: we have to put pressure on politicians because we have all the knowledge needed. She called for NGOs to take actions.

Christian Ege concluded by saying that yes, agriculture is responsible for environmental damage, but we also have solutions. It is possible to make improvements to farming systems and mitigate the consequences on the environment.

During the conference we have shown scenarios as tools to make recommendations for the future. Implementation of these scenarios can be financed by the present CAP – also in 2050, even if we continue the current reduction of the subsidies - if we just transfer more Direct Payments from Pillar 1 to Pillar 2.

He believes that we have to focus on the next occasion to change the CAP in 2018, in order to then allow MS to have more flexibility from Pillar 1 to Pillar 2 and not the other way round (as was permitted in the latest reform adopted in 2014). He made the point that we have to change this development further and that the greening of Pillar 1 has failed.

If you want more details about the scenarios please look at the Danish Ecological Council webpage on the future of agriculture: http://fremtidenslandbrug.dk/future-farming/

Alan Matthews concluded by saying that a tremendous range of perspectives were heard today. While the conference’s fundamental question of how to shift towards sustainable agriculture remains unanswered, we can be confident that we have the beginnings of the answer.