

News Release 31 March 2014

Let's Keep Europe Growing: A new vision for the future of agriculture

Farming stakeholders call for EU focus on innovation

With European elections approaching, the EU agriculture sector is calling for a new policy framework that is friendlier to innovation, jobs and growth, and which takes a balanced, science-based approach to regulation. This is vital if Europe is to remain productive and competitive – and help meet the challenge of feeding a rapidly growing world population – in the coming decades.

That message was the main focus of a gathering of key farming stakeholders held in Brussels today: **“Let's keep Europe growing: Ensuring a sustainable and productive future for European agriculture”**. Organised by the European Crop Protection Association, the conference included speakers from across the farming sector and food chain as well as the European Commission and environmental groups.

“Europe must play a role in feeding the world; we cannot leave it to others to meet the challenge,” said Jean-Charles Bocquet, Director General of the European Crop Protection Association (ECPA). *“But right now Europe's agricultural productivity is at risk. That's why Europe's crop protection industry is proposing a new way forward – one that fosters rather than discourages innovation.”*

ECPA President Jean-Philippe Azoulay said: *“Innovative solutions to fight crop pests and diseases are being pulled from the market, and research and development is shifting to other parts of the world. Now is the right time – as we will soon welcome a new European Parliament and new European Commission – to have a fruitful dialogue on how to boost innovation and sustainable agricultural productivity.”*

With that in mind, Europe's crop protection industry proposes **five key policy recommendations**:

1. Build a science-based policy framework that balances risks and benefits
2. Implement smarter and better regulation
3. Ensure consistency between EU policies and international agreements
4. Put innovation at the heart of EU policy making
5. Mainstream agricultural productivity and competitiveness

Pekka Pesonen, Secretary General of Copa-Cogeca, said: *“A strong EU agriculture sector is vital for growth and jobs, economy and society. We urge European Parliament to maximise the huge potential of the European agriculture, forestry, aquaculture and fisheries sectors. They are key for creating new business opportunities. Copa-Cogeca urges candidates in the European Parliament elections to campaign for the maintenance of a sustainable, competitive, resource efficient European agriculture sector. Investment in the sector must be stepped up, research and innovation encouraged. The food chain also needs to work better to enable farmers to get a better return from the market.”*

Gilles Dryancour, President of the European Agricultural Machinery Association (CEMA), said: *“Thanks to advanced machinery precision agriculture has become the new farming reality. Smarter and better regulation is essential for our sector to keep our innovative power and continue to help farmers to produce more with less.”*

Roxane Feller, Director of Economic Affairs, FoodDrinkEurope, said: *“The European food and drink industry is an innovative and responsible industry, and recognises the important role it has to play in driving growth and placing on the market a wide variety of safe and affordable products. Today's joint stakeholder event demonstrates the commitments of the food chain partners to ensure the promotion of innovation, competitiveness and sustainable productivity in the agri-food sector as a whole. We rely on Europe's policy makers to continue supporting these efforts through better and smarter regulation.”*

The workshop also highlighted the work already being done by industry and by farmers as part of the Hungry for Change initiative to make sure productive agriculture is also sustainable in a way that benefits us all. Hungry for Change is an industry initiative that helps contribute to the highest standards of farming sustainability with partnership projects in four key areas: food, water, biodiversity and health. For more information visit www.hungry4change.eu.

Speakers at the conference included Jean-Charles BOCQUET, ECPA Director General; Pekka PESONEN, Secretary General of COPA-COGECA; Gilles DRYANCOUR, President of CEMA; Roxane FELLER, Director Economic Affairs, FoodDrinkEurope; Jean-Philippe AZOULAY, ECPA President ; Alastair LEAKE, Director of Policy, Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust; Natalie PAUWELS, Member of Cabinet of European Environment Commissioner J. Potočník; and Caroline DRUMMOND, Chief Executive, LEAF.

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The European Crop Protection Association (ECPA) represents the crop protection industry interests at European level. Its members include all major companies and national associations across Europe. For more information: www.ecpa.eu

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