

A sustainable future for EU farming?

Policymakers, environmentalists and researchers discussed sustainable agriculture at the ‘Sustainable future for EU farming?’ conference in Brussels.



© Sonia Goicoechea

With the world population expected to exceed nine billion by 2050, the demand for food is also going to soar. The BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) are developing at a rapid rate and their populations are increasing demand for better quality food, in particular meat. How can European agriculture meet the food challenges of the future in way that does not damage the environment? How is EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) impacting sustainability? And how can

research make a difference in all of this? These questions were addressed at a recent conference, ‘Sustainable future for EU farming?’ hosted in Brussels by the European Environmental Bureau (EEB), BirdLife International and the Danish Ecological Council.


CAP reform

Speaking at the conference, Commissioner for Agriculture Phil Hogan pointed to the new greener elements of the Common Agricultural Policy Reform (CAP) such as the green payment which now constitutes 30 % of the direct payment, the simple and targeted cross compliance system and the greener rural development programme. However, he acknowledged the criticisms of the reformed CAP which have come from the environmental movement. Jeremy Wates from EEB, for example, warned of national resources being eroded on a large scale and Ariel Brunner from BirdLife International lamented that Europe is running out of biodiversity and pointed to the dramatic loss of grassland biodiversity reported in the European Environment Agency's (EEA) recent [SOER \(state and outlook 2015\)](#) report). The Commissioner insisted that one of priorities of the CAP is to improve of the sustainability of the agricultural sector, adding that for him, economic sustainability and environmental


sustainability are two sides of the same coin.

Food and farming research

There are many important activities already going on in the research community, and Commissioner Hogan noted that two of the big Horizon 2020 calls for 2016-2017 in the Mediterranean region will be on food and water.

Olivier Mora, a researcher with the [Agrimonde foresight study](#)  meanwhile introduced the results of research by a team at CIRAD and INRA in France on the topic of sustainable agriculture. The team has set up a permanent foresight tool through a platform that constructs, analyses and debates scenarios relating to global food and farming systems in the years leading up to 2050. The two scenarios are 'Agrimonde 1' and 'Agrimonde GO'. Agrimonde 1 set out to apply the principles of sustainable development. This scenario involves ecological intensification of production and a reduction in the current inequalities as regards consumption: reducing under-nutrition in some regions, while cutting waste and excess food consumption in others. The second scenario, Agrimonde GO, is primarily characterized by significant growth in calorie yield per hectare cultivated, and by unregulated global trade. It also centres on the assumption that environmental problems are not anticipated, with the certainty that they can always be overcome once they become too acute.

What does the research tell us about our planet's ability to feed 9 billion people by 2050? According to Mora, it will depend on what is on our plate, particularly the proportion of animal products, and how we protect biodiversity into the future. Following on from Agrimonde, Mora and the team at CIRAD are now undertaking a new study that investigates land use change and food insecurity – covering the impact of climate change, diet change and waste, household income, dynamics of the farm.

These areas are also a focus of the [Horizon 2020 programme](#)  which aims to address food and feed security and safety, the competitiveness of the European agri-food industry and the sustainability of food production, processing and consumption.

Countries

Belgium

Related articles



NEWS

NEW PRODUCTS AND TECHNOLOGIES

GNSS technology for better biomass mapping

9 June 2016



NEWS

How space and sensory technology can boost rice production

16 March 2015



NEWS

Developing soil management strategies for every corner of Europe

7 January 2015



NEWS

Achieving efficiency and accuracy in GM food risk assessments

20 November 2014

Last update: 25 March 2015

Permalink: <https://cordis.europa.eu/article/id/116602-a-sustainable-future-for-eu-farming>

European Union, 2025