

Enhancing innovation and economic development in future European farm management

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The European Parliament adopted by 474 votes to 115, with 54 abstentions, a resolution on enhancing innovation and economic development in future European farm management.

Members recalled that the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) estimates that the expected rise in the world's population to 9.1 billion by 2050 will in the business as usual scenario require a **60 % increase in food supply** that should be safe and of high quality and a 24 % increase in crop yields in the developed countries by that date, whilst preserving resources for future generations and preventing food waste and losses, which currently account for over one third of global production.

Land everywhere faces a drop-off in intrinsic productivity and fertility caused by land degradation, especially soil erosion. The FAO also estimates that there will only be a **4.3% increase in arable land by 2050**, which will require better management of natural resources to combat soil degradation among other issues.

Improving innovation and competitiveness: Members noted that agriculture has always developed new practices, techniques and production methods that have increased outputs, improved the adaptability of farming practices to new and changing circumstances and cut production costs.

They are convinced that economic development and sustainable production are not mutually exclusive and are achievable mainly through innovation, research and development, new governance and business models and improved agronomy. They stressed the need to support innovation in technology and governance by providing coherent and clear regulation with room for entrepreneurship. Innovation should be explicitly taken into account in forthcoming reviews and reforms of relevant legislation.

Parliament made a series of observations and recommendations:

- **innovation has the potential to increase labour productivity and income** by reducing production costs and making business more efficient. Members advocated making farming a more desirable occupation for young men and women, inter alia, by improving access to finance, technology and support programmes;
- **more extensive use of ICT** is key to making farming more environmentally sustainable and the sector more competitive. The Commission should come forward with solutions to stimulate the uptake of ICT-based management systems, real-time data monitoring, sensor technology and the use of detection systems for the optimisation of production systems or precision agriculture, which inter alia could mean adapting to changing production and market conditions leading to more efficient and optimal use of natural resources;
- **the low level of awareness concerning the potential of Big Data** and Internet of Things and the fragmentation of the related technology systems, which increase the barriers to uptake and slow down deployment. Moreover, there is the slow take up of GPS technologies. Members highlighted the importance of making these technologies meaningful to the farmers. It suggested that the Commission make available to some Member States smart tools designed to expedite the mapping of farmland;
- **the uptake of precision agriculture should be encouraged:** Members called on the Commission to remove the barriers to adopting precision farming. While welcoming the use of **drones** in agriculture, Parliament noted that a proposal for legislation is forthcoming in the revision of the

European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA)'s basic regulation, so that all drones would come under EU competence;

- **innovative solutions in animal husbandry:** Parliament encouraged innovative solutions in animal husbandry that contribute to a higher level of animal health and welfare, which reduce the need for veterinary medicinal products, including antimicrobials. Antimicrobials should be prudently and responsibly applied;
- **the untapped potential of technology and innovation for the development of new goods and products** (relating to food and feed, machinery, biochemistry, biocontrol etc.) may have the potential to create employment along the whole agri-food value chain. The Commission should look into the possibilities of incentivising farmers to raise public awareness about the workings of the agri-food chain and new production methods;
- new information technologies provide ample opportunities to establish **new value chains**, which may include more direct contact between producers and consumers, with a stronger focus on innovative products, new services and more production differentiation, with the potential to provide new income streams for farmers as well as establishing a more transparent marketplace.

Prudently use natural resources and ensure biodiversity: Members called for the intrinsic productivity, fertility and resilience of agro-ecosystems in the medium and long term to be ensured and for a reduction in emissions. They emphasised the importance of improving production systems through better-adapted crops and rotation systems, stressing the potential for job creation not only in the food production sector but also in the tourism, bio-economy and green chemistry sectors.

Food waste: Parliament underlined the need to tackle food wastage, in particular systemic food wastage, since each year 100 million tonnes of food in Europe is wasted or thrown away, which amounts to approximately 30%-50% of the food produced in the EU. Greater cooperation is also needed in the food chain to reduce current levels of waste.

Soil degradation: the resolution emphasised the possibility of **processing animal manure into mineral concentrate that could be used to manufacture 'green fertiliser'** that could reduce and eventually replace the need for mineral fertilisers, given that its efficiency level is comparable to that of the latter. The Commission is asked to revise the EU regulation on fertiliser and to remove legislative obstacles in the nitrates directive so as to enable and stimulate the development of mineral concentrate from animal manure.

Legal protection of biological inventions: in connection with innovative breeding methods for plant and animal varieties, the arrangements for the legal protection of biological inventions, under which general plant and animal varieties and essential biological processes for the production of plants and animals may not be patented. Members urged the Commission to verify the interpretation and scope of that derogation, since in the interests of food security, free access to, and use, of breeding materials must continue to be guaranteed.

Synergies with other areas: the resolution stressed the need for a simpler and more flexible legislative framework that is more geared towards national and local conditions and better suited to deliver synergies with other sectors by enhancing and promoting knowledge crossovers, integration of resource use and is **better aligned with the circular economy** in order to improve the visibility of existing systems for specific promotional labelling and encourage new innovations in the promotion of the diversity of European agricultural products.

Parliament underlined the importance of:

- resilient agriculture, adapting to **climate change** and changing weather conditions, and reducing emissions from the agricultural sector by encouraging productive, resource-efficient and circular systems;

- promoting innovation in **water management and conservation**, by means of innovative techniques and technology to reduce wasteful irrigation practices and to mitigate flooding;
- developing **integrated plant protection management systems** by supporting scientific research into non-chemical alternatives and low-risk measures, as defined in the relevant legislation, and **pesticides** which are more environmentally friendly;
- ensuring the continuous development of **innovative breeding techniques**.

The Commission was asked to provide a more ambitious overarching strategy with measurable outcomes in order to align and focus research and innovation vis-à-vis Common Agricultural Policy priorities.