

COMAGRI Public Hearing

“Enabling innovation for sustainable agriculture”

16 March 2021

Panel 1: 'Innovation in key agriculture sectors'

Statement by the European Commission, DG AGRI

- When we think about innovation, farming and forestry may not be the first areas that come to our mind. However, it is on **knowledge and innovation** that sustainable, resilient and competitive agriculture and forestry sectors build.
- Knowledge and innovation are **key drivers and enablers** in accelerating the transition to sustainable, healthy and inclusive agri-food systems. They can help develop and test new solutions to address today’s sustainability challenges, overcome barriers and uncover new market opportunities.
- The measure of their success lies in their capacity to address the **real needs of farmers and foresters**. After all, a good idea is such only if put to use “in the field”.
- **And this is where the key challenge lies!** The available knowledge and technology is not sufficiently known and used by practitioners. On average, twenty years separate the beginning of a research and its application in agriculture, because this needs the mobilisation and cooperation of different actors: farmers, advisers, industry, etc.
- In the past 7 years, the Commission has been promoting a **new way to deliver innovative solutions** that can really work for farmers and foresters and help their businesses become more competitive and sustainable.
- Under the European Innovation Partnership for agriculture (EIP-AGRI) we have encouraged farmers and foresters to work together with researchers, advisers, businesses and others to co-create and test innovative solutions ready to be put in practice. This cooperation is funded by the CAP. We call this ‘**interactive innovation**’ or **multi-actor** approach to innovation
- The EIP-AGRI has coordinated the human and financial resources of **two major EU policies**: the Common Agricultural Policy and the EU research & innovation policy. This has given rise to an impressive number of innovative projects – from local to transnational – that equipped farmers [*like Kirsten Wosnitza*] with the knowledge and tools they needed to create sustainable solutions on their farm.
- Member States and EU citizens have after initial scepticism believed in this new approach too. Their engagement is behind the start of over 2000 operational groups supported by the CAP. In addition, there are almost 200 multi-actor projects financed under the Horizon 2020 programme across Europe in the last 7 years.
- On top of that, the **EIP-AGRI network** coordinated by the European Commission has helped to bring the results of these projects to fruition, engaging over 6000 farmers, researchers, advisers and others in more than 120 events to exchange on innovative farming practices, research opportunities and fostering capacity building.

- We think that these **3 key elements** just outlined - the focus on the real needs of farmers and foresters and the working with and for them, the coordinated use of policy tools, and a strong European networking and governance focussing on knowledge and innovations exchange - are at the core of the success of the EIP.
- The positive feedback from our stakeholders further strengthen the Commission's belief in the **success** of the EIP innovation model and its efforts to further promote it.
- The Commission's proposal for the **CAP post 2020** gives knowledge and innovation centre stage. The EIP-AGRI will continue to encourage increased investment in research and innovation, and enable farmers and rural communities to benefit from it. I am glad that **both EU legislators share and support our vision**.
- Under their **CAP strategic plans** Member States will have the opportunity to make full use of the EIP-AGRI and the whole range of knowledge exchange and innovation tools (such as training, advice, innovation support, networking) **to support all the 9 CAP objectives**. This strategic approach to knowledge and innovation will be key to build stronger Agriculture Knowledge and Innovation Systems (or AKIS).
- Having heard from our practitioners today and many more during the last years, I believe initiatives like the EIP are **worth encouraging and communicating widely among EU farmers and citizens**. The Commission counts on this assembly to be ambassadors to promote this further.

Kerstin ROSENOW