



DG ENVIRONMENT

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Public Hearing on the Conservation of agricultural biodiversity
organised by the AGRI Committee

Event on 11 January 2021, 16h45 - 18h15

SPEAKING POINTS:

-) The new Biodiversity Strategy and the Farm to Fork Strategy **contribute to the same basic goal: to enable our society to live within planetary boundaries, both now and in the future.** We have indeed to think about the young generations and the type of world we are handing to them in the next few years.
-) Science tells us: **nature is in a dramatic state of decline.** In the last four decades, global wildlife populations fell by 60% as a result of human activities. Within a few decades, we lost 80% of insect populations and 60% of farmland birds – and the decline affects especially agricultural areas. **Wilderness has gone missing and more species are now at risk of extinction than at any point in human history.**
-) Secondly, we are fully dependent on nature. **Biodiversity and ecosystems provide us with**

uncountable benefits, including the elements for growing and producing our food. The future of agriculture depends on healthy soil ecosystems and the services that intact ecosystems provide in pollination and protecting our crops against pests.

-) Overall, **almost half of global GDP – some €40 trillion – is linked to nature**, with the three largest economic sectors: construction, agriculture, and food and drink, all highly dependent on nature.
-) Thirdly, **damaged ecosystems are more fragile**, have a limited capacity to deal with extreme events, exacerbated by climate change.
-) The Coronavirus pandemic has shown us how important it is to keep the health of nature in this planet. It also demonstrated that behaviours, habits and rules can change, quickly, and with an immediate effect - also on nature.
-) **The new Biodiversity Strategy** sets out a comprehensive set of targets and measures to put the EU's nature on a path to recovery by 2030, and proposes concrete targets and actions to tackle the key drivers of biodiversity loss. It will be the credible basis on which the EU will try to lead the global negotiations this year for an ambitious global deal on biodiversity.
-) It is complementary with **the Farm to Fork (F2F) strategy** representing the necessary pathway towards a **sustainable EU food system**.

-) **The new Biodiversity strategy is ambitious, yet balanced and realistic.**
-) It is based on **sound scientific evidence** about what is the minimum needed to recover from the current environmental degradation.
-) The Strategy proposes to, among others, establish **binding targets to restore damaged ecosystems**, increase the amount of **protected areas in land and sea**, improve the **conservation status of protected habitats and species**, bring back **pollinators** to agricultural land, reduce **pollution**, **green our cities**, enhance **organic farming** and other agro-ecological approaches, and improve the **health of European forests**.
-) We have learned from the policy failure in halting and reverting biodiversity loss by 2020 and **we cannot afford the EU to fail again in 2030** on achieving its biodiversity objectives, as it did in the past.
-) As guardians of our land, **farmers play a vital role in preserving biodiversity**. They are among the first to feel the consequences when biodiversity is lost but also among the first to reap the benefits when it is restored.
-) **Biodiversity enables them to provide us with safe, sustainable, nutritious and affordable food** and provides them with the income they need to thrive and develop. European farmers are an essential part of the

EU's future and must continue to be the social and economic hub of many communities across our Union.

-) At the same time, **certain agricultural practices are a key driver of biodiversity decline**. This is why it is important to work with farmers to support and incentivise the transition to fully sustainable practices. Improving the condition and diversity of agroecosystems will increase the sector's resilience to climate change, environmental risks and socioeconomic shocks, while creating new jobs, for example in organic farming, rural tourism or recreation.
-) The Biodiversity Strategy includes **specific targets and actions to reverse the decline of biodiversity on farmland**.
-) The Biodiversity Strategy proposes for instance that **10% of agricultural land should consist of 'high-diversity landscape features'**, for instance in the form of hedges or flower strips. We are not proposing anything new here. The aim is to **bring back structural elements** that have been so typical of our agricultural landscape for centuries, but that have been destroyed over the last decades.
-) Bringing back landscape elements will have very positive feedback on productivity in agriculture, facilitate pest control, improve soil health and bring climate adaptation benefits. Farmers will choose the least productive land to set aside for biodiversity. And as the Impact Assessment for the current CAP has

shown, even a reduction of the overall production would not necessarily entail a financial loss for all farmers.

) **The implementation** of this action together with the actions common to the Farm to Fork Strategy on pesticides, fertilisers and organic farming will make it possible **to significantly reduce the impacts of the agricultural sector on biodiversity**, while allowing the restoration of ecosystems and their services, **with benefits for the long-term agricultural productivity and the farming sector.**

) I do not see the risk that reducing the use of pesticides, the excess of fertilisers or the restoration of hedges, ponds and tree lines would endanger food security. The EU is the largest exporter of food in the world. And in parallel we aim to half food waste in the EU, thus reducing food demand. Therefore, there is certainly no risk that the EU could no longer feed itself.

) It is our firm intention to **ensure the long-term sustainability of farming in Europe**. And we will only succeed by explaining to farmers why these actions and targets are necessary and by supporting them in this transition. **Farmers have a lot to win, as the transition bears many new opportunities.** And it is important to engage with them on how to get the most out of the new strategy.

) **Some stakeholders suggest that there is a contradiction between a sustainable and a competitive agriculture**, but this is a very short-

sighted view and there are many **examples proving the contrary**.

-) For instance, **organic farming** is a European success story, with demand from the consumer side growing faster than the cultivation area. It is not only good for the environment, organic farming is **also beneficial in economic terms, often yielding higher revenues for farmers**, creating more jobs than conventional farming.
-) There is also evidence suggesting that **agro-ecological farmers perform better in economic terms** than conventional farmers,¹ as they do not use costly inputs such as chemical fertilizers and pesticides.
-) Many farmers are willing to embrace the change, but they need to be guided and supported: **training and advisory services** will be essential to lead this transition.

¹ Jan Douwe van der Ploeg, et al., Journal of Rural Studies, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2019.09.003>