

EP hearing on
“Conservation of agricultural biodiversity”

11/01/2021
Brussels

Speaking points - Pierre Bascou

17:40 - 18:35 Panel 2: What tools for the European Agriculture achieve the biodiversity strategy goals?

-) Important to underline that the Commission is fully committed to support the conservation of biodiversity, because the decline of biodiversity is a key concern for all European citizens, including farmers, and it represents one of the biggest challenge of our time.
-) The biodiversity decline can be attributed to many factors, including land use change, pollution, climate change and invasive alien species. But farming has a specific responsibility which is also to be recognised, mainly through unsustainable intensification and specialisation of farming practices on the one hand, and due to the abandonment of agricultural activity on the other hand.
-) The current CAP has already contributed and continues substantially to supporting farming practices beneficial for biodiversity through the complementary action of cross-compliance, the greening practices and a large range of rural development measures. To this we should add also support related to research and innovation, training and knowledge transfers.
-) But obviously, we need to do more and better. Actions to focus on three domains:
-) First of all, through a broader and a more holistic strategic approach framed by the European Green Deal and its related Biodiversity and Farm to Fork Strategies which form a coherent long-term vision aiming at promoting a sustainable, resilient and competitive food system. This ambition is translated into several ambitious targets related to agriculture, some of them with a direct biodiversity link, such as the reduction of pesticide use, an increase in high diversity landscape features, and in organic farming.
-) Delivering on this ambitious vision requires a transition at all stages of the food supply chain – requiring efforts, commitments, responsibility, and a change of mindset from all actors. We need to change how we produce and how we consume. At farm level, this also means that we need to produce more, with less and better.

-)] Second, we need to improve the biodiversity performance of the future CAP since the CAP will continue to be the core policy in supporting farmers in this transition to sustainability, resilience and competitiveness.
-)] This is foreseen on the basis of two pillars:
 - First, the introduction of a new delivery model, based on performance (with a set of performance indicators), offering more subsidiarity for Member States to better take account of local conditions and needs; and ensuring policy coherence by fully integrating other EU objectives and legislation, in particular linked to biodiversity, into the CAP.
 - Second, a reinforced policy toolbox for the conservation of biodiversity, including an enhanced conditionality (with requirements supporting on-farm biodiversity), eco-schemes in Pillar I (a novel instrument that can provide financial incentives and which is seen as a game changer), advisory services and Pillar II measures.
-)] In this endeavour, the correct enforcement of environmental legislation, which is still insufficient, is of paramount importance and will help the good design of the CAP Strategic Plans.
-)] The third and last point relates to the specific role of research and innovation. We need to invest in research and the generation of knowledge, in improving its use and in increasing the uptake of new technology (IA, robotics, satellite pictures, digital tools) in order:
 - to better measure and monitor the biodiversity situation on farm land;
 - to better understand the link between agricultural practices and biodiversity;
 - and finally to better accompany farmers in taking up and implementing the measures beneficial for biodiversity in the CAP Strategic Plans.
-)] Therefore, the future CAP with its strategic approach, the mix of stick/carrots, a significant budget, and stronger reliance on research and innovation, represents a real opportunity for farmers to improve their biodiversity performance.