

## EU must boost innovation to 'unlock potential' of agri-food sector

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News

A Parliament Magazine event has heard a call for European policymakers to support and promote the socioeconomic and environmental benefits of a productive and innovative EU agri-food sector.



Ian Duncan, a UK ECR deputy who hosted the event on Tuesday in the European parliament, warned that consumers "sometimes take for granted what we find on our plate and yet we do so at our cost and at our peril".

"Sometimes we forget how difficult the process of growing and raising and harvesting and processing can be," said the MEP, adding that policymakers must answer the call to "legislate and assist" where possible.

"The common agricultural policy reform itself may seem to be over, but I suspect it is indeed far from over" - Ian Duncan

"The common agricultural policy (CAP) reform itself may seem to be over, but I suspect it is indeed far from over. There is still much work to do and I do not doubt that people will have many questions for us on how we will assist in the process as it goes forward."

The event - Food for Thought: A vision for unlocking the potential of agriculture and the food industry in the EU - was organised in partnership with the Agri-Food Chain Coalition made up of 11 leading industry associations who are calling for sustainable, solution-orientated policymaking.

With this in mind, the [Agri-Food Chain Coalition has issued a report](#) [1] urging EU policymakers to push for a shift towards innovation as a means of realising the potential of Europe's agricultural and food industries and allowing them to tackle the many challenges facing the sector.

"We need to unlock the potential of the agriculture and food industry in Europe" - Czesław Adam Siekierski

Also speaking at the event was chair of parliament's agriculture and rural development (AGRI) committee Czesław Adam Siekierski, who agreed that, "We need to unlock the potential of the agriculture and food industry in Europe."

"We take this very seriously in the AGRI committee," he stressed, adding that it was vital to "provide food security and food safety at the heart of our actions" and "protect the quality of our products".

"We must promote products from the member states within the internal market, as well as for worldwide export," he said, adding that MEPs were working on solutions to the "challenges that the European agriculture and agri-food industry is facing".

Also in attendance was Italian MEP Paolo De Castro, who expressed his hope that the European parliament would "again put farmers in the centre of our interest and how they can be more competitive and strong in the market".

"We need to help farmers be more competitive, not just give them more bureaucracy" - Paolo De Castro

De Castro echoed Duncan's comments on the CAP, saying the reform process had been "just a step" and that Europe's farmers must "reflect on their future".

"We need to help farmers be more competitive, not just give them more bureaucracy."

Further comment came from Belgian ALDE deputy Philippe De Backer who chose to highlight "one point that is not often thought of, especially by the broader public, when they think of the food on their plate; and that is innovation".

"If we want our farmers to create new and innovative foods, in new ways with new business models that are more sustainable and more environmentally friendly then I think innovation is the key" - Philippe De Backer

"When you look at the whole value chain of food production you still see a lot of innovation going on. If we want our farmers to create new and innovative foods, in new ways with new business models

that are more sustainable and more environmentally friendly than I think innovation is the key."

"We at the European level need to do everything possible," stressed De Backer, adding that this is why he supports the call for the creation of "a regulatory framework that allows new innovations to come to the market and really serve the consumers and clients who are out there."

Mella Frewen, the director general of FoodDrinkEurope and speaking on behalf of the Agri-Food Chain Coalition, said the event was evidence of the "ongoing productive dialogue" with the European parliament.

The Food for Thought initiative, which began in April this year, was launched with two aims in mind, said Frewen. "The first was to identify the challenges we face as a group collectively and the second was to propose a set of recommendations for policymakers so that the European agri-food sector can reach its full economic and social potential."

"We must ensure innovation is at the core of policymaking, with a particular focus on agriculture and food chain research and we need to build a better functioning single market, with a reduction in unnecessary administrative barriers" - Mella Frewen

"We are an integral part of the economic and social fabric throughout Europe. We employ more than 30 million people, which is a lot. We also account for 3.5 per cent of EU's total gross value added."

"We are aware that the future presents uncertainties and challenges and we must be adequately equipped and prepared to face these if we are to remain stable and able to create the jobs which are so desperately needed throughout the region, particularly for Europe's youth."

"The challenges we have identified are: providing food security, ensuring food safety, helping create jobs and growth, safeguarding the environment and making sure we can continue to meet the diverse needs of all of Europe's consumers."

"In order to meet these challenges," said Frewen, "we need a business environment rooted in the three pillars of sustainability: the social pillar, the economic pillar and the environmental pillar. Achieving this will require leadership and decisive action from European policymakers and in particular the new parliament."

"We must ensure innovation is at the core of policymaking, with a particular focus on agriculture and food chain research and we need to build a better functioning single market, with a reduction in unnecessary administrative barriers," she concluded.

**The organisations which make up the Agri-Food Chain Coalition are: CELCAA, CEMA, COCERAL, Copa-Cogeca, the European Association for Bio-industries (Europabio), the European Crop Protection Association (ECPA), European Seed Association, European Feed Manufacturers' Federation (FEFAC), Fertilizers Europe, FoodDrinkEurope and the International Federation of Animal Health - Europe (IFAH-Europe)**

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