Technological solutions to sustainable agriculture discussed in the European Parliament

On 7th June 2016, the European Parliament adopted a report on "Technological solutions to sustainable agriculture in the EU"[1]. The report was produced by the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development. Members of the Committee include Matt Carthy MEP, Luke Ming Flanagan MEP and Mairead McGuinness MEP.

The report made recommendations on precision farming, big data and informatics, soil water and nutrient management, genetic diversity, precision breeding, plant protection products, skills development and knowledge transfer plus research and funding priorities. The report noted the importance of keeping Europe at the centre of scientific development and innovation.

Responding to the report, Commissioner Phil Hogan noted the importance of focusing on the need for sustainable agriculture in the EU. He welcomed the focus on precision farming, soil and nutrient management, skills development and knowledge transfer plus the emphasis on reducing bureaucracy and red tape.

On precision farming, Commissioner Hogan noted "there is little doubt that big data and precision farming hold significant promise for the future of agricultural production in Europe, and the report encourages the Commission to stimulate the development and uptake of precision and to remove the barriers to the integration of fragmented ICT systems". He noted the Commission is very anxious to encourage more precision farming but acknowledged the conclusions of the *EIP-AGRI Focus Group on Precision Farming*[2] which reported that farmers are hesitant in the use of precision farming for several reasons, such as data ownership, being locked in by a single supplier of software and/or machinery and wanting to see added value before they invest. He also acknowledged the many possibilities offered by precision farming technologies in view of the sustainability challenges that food production is facing, highlighting the EIP pilot projects under the Rural Development Programme.

The Commissioner stressed the importance of knowledge transfer, noting that innovation and outcomes from research have great potential, which can only be realised through practical on-farm application and demonstration.

The Committee debate and Commissioner Hogan's comments can be read here and watched here.

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[1] Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development, European Parliament (2016), "Report on technological solutions for sustainable agriculture in the EU" (2015/2225 (INI)), available online http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//NONSGML+REPORT+A8-2016-0174+0+DOC+PDF+V0//EN

[2] EIP-AGRI Focus Group on Precision Farming (2015), "Mainstreaming precision farming: How to organise the data capture and processing to mainstream the application of precision farming for an optimisation of inputs and yield?", available online https://ec.europa.eu/eip/agriculture/sites/agri-eip/files/eip-agri_focus_group_on_precision_farming_final_report_2015.pdf

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