

# CountrySide

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## Regional Forum for the Future of Agriculture: Long-term sustainability in farming and forestry

Jari LEPPÄ

*Finnish Minister for Agriculture and Forestry*



## Regional Forum for the Future of Agriculture: Long-term sustainability in farming and forestry



Each year, the Forum for the Future of Agriculture hosts two regional events in order to better understand local issues, discuss the concerns of land managers and further the concept of combined food and environmental security. The latest regional event took place in Helsinki, Finland on the 13<sup>th</sup> June.

Robert de GRAEFF, ELO; Jessica WILLIAMS, ELO

Participants at the Regional Forum for the Future of Agriculture in Helsinki (Finland) concluded that if Europe is serious about its ambitions, especially those related to climate change and biodiversity, then it needs to properly fund the CAP. These ambitions mean that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), set out by the UN, must be put at the heart of the food systems agenda. At a time of political uncertainty on the world stage, and increasingly within the European Union itself, as it grapples with the final shape of the CAP reform and its Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), prioritising these goals becomes more important than ever.

Jari LEPPÄ, the Finnish Minister for Agriculture and Forestry, described the local specificities of Finnish agriculture, with

its long winters and short summers, saying that these conditions “do not prevent the Finnish from wanting clean, safe and affordable food”. The Minister went on to note some of the major global and local concerns, with a particular emphasis on climate change, saying that the negative externalities of livestock must be taken more seriously, especially as extreme weather events pose a threat to food security.

To demonstrate the changes needed, and the different ways that Finnish farms are adapting, Markus EEROLA described how he is developing a circular economy on his organic Knehtilä family farm by applying “Palopuro agroecological symbiosis”. This is a cooperative food production system based on energy and nutrient self-sufficiency which produces food in an envi-

ronmentally-friendly and affordable way. “The symbiotic process recycles nutrients, promotes crop growth and reduces stress on waterways,” he explained, offering it as a model for other food producing communities around the world. He also explained that by bringing tourists and urban visitors to his farm, he is able to sell his products locally for better prices and helps visitors to understand the realities of modern farming.

### International Trade, Food Security and Climate Change

“I used to keep a scrapbook of the serious impacts of climate change around the world, but I can no longer keep up. It would take an army of scribes to keep up now” said David VINER, Principle Adviser on Climate Change for Mott Macdon-



ald, setting the stage for the session and clearly outlining the real costs of not dealing with climate change for businesses. Further costs for the agricultural sector were outlined by Mikhail ORLOV, President of Ambika Group, who noted that Europe's political has turned inwards and away from the rapidly advancing economies to its east and south and that this would soon mean that these countries would overtake them. He worried that Europe's political class was populated with "bureaucrats who talked about small percentages of change, rather than politicians with vision." In contrast, Xavier LEPRINCE of Syngenta offered a real, climate-resistant vision that showcased the importance of new seed-breeding techniques, working closer with farmers and helping them protect biodiversity.

#### Scandinavia and the Future of the CAP

Minister LEPPÄ also spoke of his country's ambitions for the CAP, saying that he was committed to fight against the cuts in the budget, especially at a time where the Finnish agricultural sector is still recovering from the Russian embargo. He further stated that the budget was vital if the CAP was going to deliver on its environmental performance. However, as Allan BUCKWELL of the RISE Foundation noted, "I would hate to be the Commissioner because anything you say is wrong to someone". Prof. BUCKWELL went on to deliver a strong critique of the environmental performance of the CAP and urged Member States to use the new Strategic Plans to do more than was possible under 'greening'. However, Valeriu STERIU, Romanian MP, warned that it was not only up to farmers, as most Europeans still waste far too much food. Giv-

en the discussion in the room, it remains doubtful that the reform could be finalized before the end of the current Commission and Parliament's terms, according to Austria's Ambassador to Finland Maximilian HENNIG.

#### Sustainable management of natural resources

Pentti TÖRMÄ, Editor-in-chief of Käytännön Maamies, moderated the final panel of the day which focused on the sustainable management of natural resources, and the role of landowners in combatting climate change and biodiversity loss.

Forty percent of carbon in the atmosphere comes from land-use change and carbon losses from the soil, according to Ilkka HERLIN, Board member of Baltic Sea Action Group. He added this will only increase if societies do not switch from conventional farming to 'carbon farming'. Carbon farming can cover small changes in land management like introducing no-till cropping, reducing the use of pesticides and fertilizers, and agroforestry practices. Fredrik von LIMBURG STIRUM, who was voted Baltic Sea Farmer of the year in 2017 and whose estate, Koskis Gård, was awarded a *Wildlife Estates* label in recognition of his biodiversity enhancing management practices, added that tourism will be more important than food production in Finland in future, and that it is essential that the landscapes and the ecosystem services of the land are developed. Jürgen TACK, Director of the Flemish Landowners Organization, described the financial incentives that are given to NGOs in Flanders, to purchase and manage land for conservation purposes. However, advances have been made, primarily

by networks such as *Wildlife Estates*, and new legislation entitles private landowners access to the same subsidies. This is a recognition that nature is best preserved through sustainable land-use within a viable economic and social framework. Key-note speaker, Robert FLIES, former advisor to the director in DG Environment at the European Commission, highlighted the importance of effective communication with the general public as a crucial element in combatting climate change and biodiversity loss.

**The Next FFA Regional will take place in Kiev on Thursday 11 October.**



#### Two new *Wildlife Estates* labels awarded in Finland

During the FFA gala dinner two new WE labels were awarded: to Fredrik von LIMBURG STIRUM, for the Koskis Gård Estate; and to Karl FAZER for the Hahkiala Estate; both in recognition for their exceptional work to protect and conserve biodiversity for future generations.

**For more information please visit [www.wildlife-estates.eu](http://www.wildlife-estates.eu)**