



Helen VOLSKA (moderator), Kazys STARKEVICIUS, Oleksiy PAVLENKO, Olha TROMIFIMTSEVA, Leonid KOZACHENKO, Vitali BASHYNSKYI

Regional Forum for the Future of Agriculture: Achieving a future of food and environmental sustainability

Each year, the Forum for the Future of Agriculture (FFA) meets twice in different European regions. The second event of 2018 took place on 25 October in Kiev (Ukraine) to discuss food and environmental security in global and local contexts as well as access to new technologies. These topics were chosen to highlight both the Ukrainian and European state of play regarding food production, environmental protection and global competitiveness.

Matthew DEMPSEY, 'Irish Farmers Journal' & ELO member



Welcoming the participants Pierre Olivier DRÈGE, President of the European Landowners' Organization (ELO) underlined that: "Ukraine remains world-famous for its black earth and its tremendous potential for local, European and indeed global agricultural production. Making the best and most sustainable use of this treasure means applying the latest technology and best farm practices, but also making sure that its farm businesses are on the cutting edge of environmental care."

Dr Hans HOOGEVEEN, Ambassador/Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the United Nations in Rome, Chair of the FAO Programme Committee introduced by video the first session on *food and environmental security in global and local contexts*. When pointing out the huge opportunities for African agriculture using EU expertise, he said: "We are losing our fight against hunger

and obesities worldwide. European agriculture has to step up its contribution to global sustainable agriculture and markets." Poor nutrition is leading to stunting both physically and mentally the population, while in sub-Saharan Africa, because of poor infrastructure and facilities, 70% of food output never reaches the final consumer and is, in effect, wasted. This presents an opportunity and an obligation. Climate change and droughts are exacerbating the situation but it must be tackled given the forecasts for population growth in Africa and the present pressures forcing many to attempt to reach Europe.

Increasing productivity and at the same time saving the planet was the challenge underlined by Oleksiy PAVLENKO, former Ukrainian Minister of Agrarian Policy and Food. While speaking about the worldwide problem of accessing clean water and the consequences of importing agricultural products, he emphasized that Ukraine is

the only country that can easily double its production. To free up this huge potential, education and rural development must go hand in hand, and that is before having even mentioned that the actual state of play of Crimea and Donetsk has to be solved first.

Kazys STARKEVICIUS, member of the Lithuanian Parliament and former Minister for Agriculture spoke of his country's agricultural experience. Prior to the Russian occupation, agriculture in Lithuania was comparable to Denmark but the Russian occupation created "a hopeless situation in Lithuanian farming" however the sector is now again making progress.

The comparison with Ukraine was clear with Olha TROMIFIMTSEVA, Deputy Minister on European Integration, Ministry of Agrarian Policy and Food, Ukraine and Vitali BASHYNSKYI, Head of Social council of State Service for Food Safety and



Oleksandr ZEMOYDA, Gautier MAUPU, Xavier LEPRINCE, Hendrik BOURGEOIS, Lesya KUZMENKO, Taras VYSOTSKYI (moderator)

Consumer Protection; also drawing attention to the world class competitiveness of Ukrainian agriculture and being confident that the country can double production with its soil quality and human capital. Ukraine is already supplying 50m tonnes of grain to the world market.

Leonid KOZACHENKO, member of Parliament of Ukraine, explained his country's significant role in agriculture but added that to triple the production vast investments are needed. To achieve this, the European Union needs to support his country in adjusting the increase in the trade quota. A possible solution could be to strengthen bilateral collaboration e.g. with France.

The speakers considered EU agriculture over-regulated but were willing to achieve EU registration for their products which would give them worldwide credibility. Ukrainian agriculture stands very much on its own feet with just 0.5% of the national budget going to the sector compared with 30% in the EU as they pointed out. They saw a huge investment opportunity in developing pork, poultry and energy crops. At the moment, there are seven million landowners but the leasing system is well developed. Farm land cannot be sold or pledged for credit and foreigners will not be allowed buy Ukrainian land for at least 10 years. They all highlighted that Ukrainian soil is very valuable and you need a balance.

Opening the second panel on access to new technologies Lesya KUZMENKO, EBRD Deputy Head Ukraine, ICA (Industry, Commerce and Agribusiness), said: "Achieving

a sustainable food future requires meeting three competing needs simultaneously: efficiently closing the food gap; preserving natural resources and climate, while improving the environmental and social impact of agribusiness. The EBRD adopts a responsible, sustainable and innovative approach to achieve the best balance among the three competing aspects." She also spoke of the organisation's willingness to invest in Ukraine and pointed out the enormous scope for increased production and the use of new technology such as gene editing and new data management techniques having the capacity to give more precision in the application of inputs and measurement of outputs.

Xavier LEPRINCE, EAME Business Sustainability Head, Syngenta underlined that: "We should give much credit to Ukrainian agriculture to be one of the world leading agricultural powerhouses. However, there is more untapped potential to be a key player in feeding the growing population of the world. Implementing cutting edge innovations and technology will help sustainably increase yields and save fertile farmlands."

The discussion concentrated on how to access and finance digital technologies to reduce costs, optimize output and improve quality. Hendrik BOURGEOIS, Vice President Corporate Affairs EMEA, Cargill shared how customized digital technology improved their internal processes thus increasing profitability and productivity. The elements that impede the creation of new business models though digital technologies are affordability, trust in the system and contractual agreements on knowing

who owns the data as analysed by Gautier MAUPU, Senior Consultant at Agritel and Oleksandr ZEMOYDA, General Director of Strategic Planning and European Integration Directorate, Ministry of Agrarian policy and Food.

All agreed that the new motto for Ukraine should be "Brains and grains". While admitting that the EU and Ukraine are competitors all agreed that more should be done to cooperate than to compete. Despite the huge number of landowners farming in Ukraine is industrial in its scale and management. It is a unique country and the collapse in agricultural output in Crimea since the Russian invasion is making them more aware of what Europe and the world can offer.

The FFA was concluded by a captivating field trip to the Berezan region. Investing in Eastern European agriculture has been a disaster for some but very profitable for others. The large and fertile country of Ukraine has seen both.

On behalf of the regional FFA organisers and partners, we would like to thank once more the speakers and moderators of the FFA event.

We would also like to extend a special thanks to the Grain Alliance Team for their time and effort and allowing us to have a better understanding, during the field trip, of the challenges ahead for the Ukraine and the EU.