European Commission

Designing the path

A **strategic approach** to EU agricultural **research & innovation**

Brussels, Charlemagne building
26-28 January 2016

#EU_AgriResearch

Agriculture and Rural Development

Conference summary

May 2016

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Summary

Three days to design the path towards future EU agricultural research and innovation

Entitled "Designing the path: a strategic approach to EU agricultural research and innovation", the conference built on the outcomes of a 6-month process started in June 2015 in EXPO Milan. Its objectives were to present what a strategic approach to EU Agricultural research and innovation could be and to discuss various aspects of how it could be implemented. Discussions allowed identifying concrete proposals that will help guide future activities.

Over **500 participants** (scientists, farmers, up and downstream industry, civil society and government representatives) attended the various pre-events, plenary and parallel sessions composing the conference organised by the European Commission on 26-28 January in Brussels.

Opening the conference, **Commissioner Hogan** stated that "*research and innovation will play a vital role in improving the future prospects of the agricultural sector and rural areas*". Acknowledging that "*we have allowed agricultural research to become a lower priority*", he emphasized how vital it is to invest in R&I, to meet the challenges ahead and allow the agricultural sector to become "*smarter, leaner and cleaner*". He also encouraged all research providers and funders, in Europe and at global level, to come together to pool resources, boost synergies and "build new fora for true collaboration". **Dutch Vice-minister Hoogeveen** highlighted the crucial importance of agricultural innovation in their Council presidency priorities for the first semester of 2016 and invited Europe to take a leading role worldwide.

The imperative of long-term, coordinated approaches

International experts were invited to introduce the main challenges facing farming and food systems, the most important trends and to present how they intend to tackle these challenges at various levels (European, global). **Philip Pardey** (University of Minnesota) focused on food security challenges and its underlying demographic features. He also presented the current investment trends in agricultural research and development, highlighting a geographic disconnect in the evolution of food demand and agriculture research and innovation. **Jerzy Plewa** (European Commission) then introduced the proposed EU agricultural R&I strategic approach. **Frank Rijsberman** (CGIAR) and **Xurong MEI** (CAAS) presented respectively the CGIAR strategy for 2016-2030 and the views of China on how to better coordinate at global level. The session confirmed the need to strengthen cooperation and partnerships at international level.

Societal expectations from farm to fork

A stakeholder panel then discussed expectations from consumers, retailers, food industry, farmers and civil society regarding agriculture research and innovation. Wim Verbeke introduced the audience to different drivers of citizen and consumer behaviour. The debate highlighted a need for closer and more genuine engagement with different supply chain actors, enhancing their role in changing the system. The panel also pleaded for greater attention to public benefits from publicly funded research, greater attention to health and nutrition content of food as opposed to quantity and a better anticipation of how the digital revolution may change the food system.

After these opening sessions, participants were invited to join six parallel sessions in which ways forward were discussed for a range of implementation issues. A panel was invited to react to parallel sessions outcomes. Conclusions are presented in the following page. In his closing remarks, **Commissioner Moedas** welcomed the conference outcomes as a rich input into the development of an EU research and innovation agenda for food and nutrition security.

How can we be more systemic in our approaches?

Being more systemic means considering all challenges simultaneously, integrating different components of farming systems, value chains and territorial features in a holistic manner and reintegrating medium to long-term approaches at various stages of the knowledge and innovation process. Development of metrics and methods enabling integrated assessment of systems performance would help this systemic approach, as well as participatory assessment of what desirable futures would look like and greater understanding of the role played by different actors.

How can we work better together at European level?

Enhancing synergies among Member States and with European programmes requires thinking more thoroughly about how to strengthen cooperation in the programming process and achieve better agenda alignment. It also requires making greater use of synergies and complementarities between various available instruments, simplifying their implementation were possible and facilitating participation of more Member States, including those with smaller capacities. Finally, linkages between regional, national, European and international level need to be improved.

How can we work better together at global level?

International cooperation, seen as an imperative in conference debates, could improve thanks to closer collaboration between government departments in charge of agriculture, international development and research and increased investments in research and innovation partnerships aiming to solve global issues. These would include multilateral and bilateral partnerships as complementary tools and should explore new cooperation mechanisms such as International Research Consortia. Cooperation with Africa and cooperation on soils were seen as priorities.

How can we modernize our knowledge systems?

Modernising our knowledge and innovation systems means sustaining efforts in the interactive innovation model, with a balanced support to each component of the knowledge creation process and improved linkages between these components (between basic to applied research, between different geographical scales, between different disciplines). Upstream, research priorities should be identified together with concerned parties. Open data and open access to results should become default standards. The science-rewarding system should be improved to better reward impact.

How can we make research results fit for policymaking?

Contribution of research and innovation activities to policy-making can be enhanced through continuous improvement of the science-society-policy interface, including a genuine and continuous societal engagement process, a careful check of how funded activities align with society needs (not only at the level of strategic orientations but also at later stages) and boosting outreach activities, building on better communication, interpersonal skills and upstream involvement of policy-makers.

How can we boost synergies with the private sector?

Synergies and complementarities between public and private R&I can be improved by focusing public support on the provision of outcomes which could not be expected otherwise, which deliver public benefits along with private benefits and which integrate long-term objectives. Activities should focus on developing support instruments for public-private partnerships with specific focus on facilitating SME participation, raising awareness on available support, increasing flexibility and accessibility of financial instruments and exploring possibilities to support long-term projects.

How can we better involve farmers in creating and exchanging knowledge?

Better involvement starts from the recognition of the central role that farmers play in the knowledge creation and exchange process: they are not only end-users but should be involved genuinely and upstream in the definition and implementation of research and innovation activities. Long-term support to the multi-actor approach, which requires such involvement, is indispensable to achieve progress, as well as improving mutual understanding between scientists, farmers and intermediaries, mutual understanding, through sustained attention to facilitators such as advisors.

More information

Conference web page:
http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/horizon2020/en/news/designing-path-strategic-approach-eu-agricultural-research-and-innovation

Disclaimer

This report assembles the contributions from speakers and participants in the context of a conference held on 26-28 January 2016. These contributions do not represent the views of the European Commission.