

# Opening Speech by Commissioner Phil Hogan at EU Conference

- *“A Strategic Approach to EU Agricultural Research and Innovation”*

**27<sup>th</sup> January 2016, Brussels**

- Check Against Delivery –
  
- Vice-minister Hoogeveen, Members of the European Parliament, Ladies and gentlemen,
  
- I am honoured to open this conference today.

- And I am delighted that so many of you, over 500 people from all around Europe and also from other continents, are with us for this important debate, both here and online. A warm welcome to you all.
- I want to kickstart this discussion with a number of guiding statements. I would ask that you keep these in mind during the coming debates.
- I think we can all agree on the first: research and innovation will play a vital role in improving the future prospects of the agricultural sector and rural areas.
- Secondly, we must acknowledge that we have fallen behind on our targets, and we have allowed agricultural research to become a lower priority.
- Thirdly, and most importantly, you can make a real difference here this week. In your discussions, you have a central role to play in informing the Commission's final strategy paper. Please make the most of this excellent opportunity.

- Let's look at the backdrop to our conference. Concerns over commodity prices, food security and climate change have emphasised how **vital it is to invest in agricultural research and innovation**. The sector **must become smarter, leaner and cleaner**.
- We need to keep producing enough healthy food for everyone, now and in the future, in Europe and globally. But we also know we will face more extreme weather, more resource scarcity, more volatile markets and more demanding consumers. So to meet these challenges head-on, we **will require more knowledge, and better knowledge**.
- Knowledge that enables us to build a more competitive and sustainable European primary production;
- To **protect the environment** and develop **new value chains in vibrant rural areas**;
- And to **cater for the varied needs** of our hugely diverse agri-food systems and territories.
- We have already taken a number of important steps towards restoring agricultural research and innovation to priority status.

- In 2013, the EU decided to **double its efforts in the field under Horizon 2020**, the EU programme for research and innovation, and by **making knowledge and innovation a central plank of our rural development policy**.
- Just before that, in 2012, the European Innovation partnership for agriculture productivity and sustainability (EIP-AGRI) was launched to bridge the gap between research and practice. I am very pleased that the EIP-AGRI has been taken up so widely by Member States and regions in their new Rural Development Programmes.
- Farmers must be empowered to embrace research and innovation, working in collaboration with scientists and investors to generate knowledge at an early stage. The EIP-AGRI provides a promising vehicle for achieving this goal.
- Having come this far, it was time to take the next steps on the journey.
- Our responsibility now is to make these instruments deliver, and provide solutions for the challenges that agriculture, forestry and rural areas are facing, up to 2020 **and beyond**.

- **So we decided to think ahead.**
- On 19 June last year, we **launched a process to build a long-term strategy for EU agricultural research and innovation.** We started with a number of questions:
  - How will the sector develop? What are our future research needs? How can we best deliver these? And what does society expect?
- We have **collected the answers to these questions from a wide range of sources**, such as workshops and consultations involving **over three hundred experts.** Many of these farmers, researchers, businesses, advisors, authorities, and innovation agencies are here in the room today and I would like to thank them for their contributions.
- We also took into account outcomes from the Standing Committee on Agricultural Research, and the recommendations of the EXPO EU Scientific committee.
- **A strong draft paper on a strategic approach to EU agriculture research and innovation is now on the table.**

- Our challenge is to finesse and finalise this document in the same collaborative spirit which has prevailed since the beginning.
- I believe that we must be guided by a number of home truths in relation to research and innovation.
- **The first truth is this: research takes time.**
- Penicillin was discovered – **inadvertently** – by Ian Fleming in 1928 and became the first ever antibiotic in 1942, **14 years later.**
- And today, too, it can take a lot of time to develop an initial idea or discovery into an innovation. Also, some discoveries are driven by simple **curiosity** and we need to allow for such curiosity to happen – on the farm and in the lab.
- So any research programme worth its salt needs to take into account that results are not delivered overnight, and therefore taking a **long term approach is critical.**

- Research has to cater for **present, immediate needs** – such as improving competitiveness and developing new products - but it must also **anticipate future needs**.
- **The second home truth we should recall is this:**
- **Research is a process with various steps, all of which have to be strengthened.**
- We need to find the right balance between the different types of research and innovation activities so that all necessary steps are adequately supported.
- We need to incentivise creativity and basic research so that we produce knowledge that will be of use in the future. And we also need to boost downstream activities so that the "last mile" towards innovation is bridged.
- Such an approach will increase the **consistency, sequencing and impact** of our activities in the long run. It should be conducted in a way that prioritises the needs of end-users and society as a whole.

- **The third home truth underpinning our long-term strategy is this:**
- **We need to pool our resources and find new fora for true collaboration.**
- Confronting the global challenges facing agriculture requires us to pool our efforts. In a period of budget constraints, we need to achieve results **collectively** by making the **best use of the resources we have**. We need to **boost synergies and complementarities between different research funders and providers**.
- We just celebrated downstairs the **launch of the STAR-IDAZ international research consortium on animal health**, in which research funders are pooling up to 1 billion euro for coordinated research activities: this is a good example of the collective approach.
- I am happy that key global players in the field of agricultural research are represented today, including the Chinese presidency of the **G20 group of Agricultural Chief Scientists**, the **Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research**, and the **Global Forum on agricultural research**.

- I hope this conference can contribute to greater international cooperation in which the EU can play its full role.
- Europe has some of the world's leading agricultural research institutes, with decades of expertise. **We are ready and willing to share this with our partners throughout the world.**
- If we follow these guidelines, research and innovation can help us develop the technologies and systems to produce **sufficient, healthy, quality food** with **fewer resources**.
- It can help us develop new business models that will provide **growth and jobs** in rural territories.
- It can allow us to **take full advantage of the digital revolution**.
- It can help us find **smart ways to manage our land** so that it delivers sustainably for various uses.
- And I would add that the **policy relevance of this strategy extends beyond the CAP**.

- I have no doubt that our research and innovation programme will contribute to the **EU Circular Economy Package**, to our **Forest strategy implementation**, to **environmental policy**, to renewable **energy** and to **food safety** policy.
- It will also help us reach the sustainable development goals adopted last September. These provide a global framework against which all signatories have to deliver, not only on the most obvious **goal 2 to 'End hunger'** but also on other goals addressing sustainable consumption and production, climate change and land management.
- The Director General of DG AGRI Jerzy Plewa will in a few minutes elaborate on what we see as priority areas for the future and the main implementation challenges.
- In conclusion, ladies and gentlemen, the strategy paper we are discussing today and tomorrow is not set in stone. This is still a draft document which will be finalised in the coming weeks on the basis of this conference's outcomes.

- Beyond the paper, this process should be **viewed as a continuous dialogue regarding what our programmes should be**. The strategy is therefore as much a process as a single document.
- And beyond the content of our research activities, we would like to **take this opportunity to discuss with you how we can best make this strategic approach work**.
- How can we be more systematic in our approaches? How can we work better together, at European level and at global level? How can we modernize the governance of our knowledge systems? How can we create synergies with the private sector? How can we better involve farmers in creating and exchanging knowledge?
- These are all questions on which we welcome and expect **your active contribution. Your insight and expertise will** assist in creating **concrete proposals to drive our action in the future**, for the **remaining years of Horizon 2020, and beyond**.
- I wish you fruitful debates and look forward to the outcomes.
- **Thank you.**