

Speech by Commissioner Phil Hogan at EAAP Conference

- *“European Agriculture – Challenges, Opportunities
and Innovation as a Driver of Change”*

30th August 2016, Belfast

- Check Against Delivery –

- Minister McIlveen, President Chemineau, Distinguished Guests,

- I'm delighted to be here with you today in Belfast. I make it my business as Agriculture Commissioner to attend events of this type whenever possible.

- In my view they are essential laboratories for developing policies and plans appropriate to the agri-food sector of the 21st Century.
- Before I provide an overview of the work happening at European level, allow me to congratulate Minister McIlveen on her appointment and wish her the best of luck in the job.
- You are taking office at a very important and challenging time, and I would like to offer my personal assurances that my services and I will assist you in whatever way we can in the coming weeks and months. It also has to be said that Northern Ireland seems fond of Agriculture Ministers named Michelle!
- I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate EAAP President Philippe Chemineau for his four year term of office, which concludes with this meeting.

- Philippe's vision for EAAAP has resulted in a dynamic new structure focused on the application of science to improve animal production. I would also like to wish every success to Philippe's successor Matthias Gauly as he embarks on his four year term of office.
- Finally, my thanks to Professor Sinclair Mayne for facilitating my participation here today.
- Ladies and gentlemen, the fundamentals of European agriculture are sound. We produce the best, safest and healthiest food and drink products in the world. Our Common Agricultural Policy has been guaranteeing our continent's food security for several generations.
- We must always strive to maintain the traditions and know-how that have been the heart of European agriculture for hundreds of years.

- But we must equally be brave enough to acknowledge that agriculture in the 21st Century needs to adapt and evolve to be fit for purpose in a changing world.
- These days, we expect our farmers to do much more than simply provide us with safe and healthy food – we expect them to keep our rural areas beautiful; we expect them to generate jobs and economic growth; we expect them to contribute to environmental and sustainability targets.
- **And innovation within the sector is the key to balancing these different priorities.** I would also add that innovation must above all serve to assist the farmer in his or her challenging livelihood. New research and applications must help to make the farmer's work more productive, more sustainable, more profitable and even more enjoyable!

- I would like to praise Philippe for his excellent definition of a truly sustainable and innovative agriculture. He has described this as *“the efficient production of safe, high quality agricultural products, in a way that protects and improves the natural environment, the social and economic conditions of farmers, their employees and local communities, and safeguards the health and welfare of all farmed species”*.
- This is a definition I think we can all subscribe to. So let's talk about how we get there.
- I'll begin by reminding you of the work already happening to boost innovation in the agri-food sector.
- Concerns over commodity prices, food security and climate change have emphasised how **vital it is to invest in agricultural research and innovation**. We know that the sector **must become smarter, leaner and cleaner**.

- 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;
- Knowledge to **protect the environment** and develop **new value chains** in **vibrant rural areas**;
- Knowledge to **cater for the varied needs** of our hugely diverse agri-food systems and territories.
- We know we need this knowledge, but it is fair to say that, as a result of the various crises which confronted the European Union in the last decade, we fell behind on our targets, and allowed agricultural research to become a lower priority.

- However, there is a resurgent conviction at European level to change this fact, and we have taken strong steps to back innovation in the sector in recent years.
- First and foremost, we **doubled our investment in the field under Horizon 2020**, the EU programme for research and innovation.
- And secondly, we took the crucial decision to **make knowledge and innovation a central plank of our rural development policy**. This means that every EU Member State and eligible region can prioritise innovation and research in the delivery of their rural development funding.
- Right here in Northern Ireland, for example, dedicated knowledge and innovation funding in your Rural Development Programme will create almost 30 000 places on training courses for farmers and other rural businesses.

- We have also launched a European Innovation Partnership for agriculture productivity and sustainability – designed to bridge the gap between research and practice. I am very pleased that the EIP-AGRI as we call it 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.
- 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**.

- 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 deliver these? And what does society expect?
- 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**.

- Today, likewise, 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 we can agree that results are not delivered overnight, and therefore taking a **long term approach is critical**.
- Research must 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 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**. Events such as this can be very fruitful and productive in this respect.
- 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** and animals so that their sustainable growth and production is ensured.
- Ladies and gentlemen, farmers never stop innovating. Every generation brings new technological and organisational improvements.
- **But it's a fact that in this era of hyper-connectivity, where the pace of technological innovation is proceeding faster than ever before, agriculture has not yet caught up with the "digital revolution".**

- Yes, there is plenty of innovation in the sector, but we must do more, and faster.
- Smart and digital agriculture holds many promises for a more sustainable, productive, and competitive EU farm sector. We have seen solutions that have the potential to significantly improve resource efficiency, animal health, carbon footprint, and farmers' position in the supply chain.
- **We must continue developing new ideas and solutions, while also encouraging a wider uptake in the broader farm community.**
- The European Commission will maintain this priority in the years ahead, and I encourage you all to play your part. Thank you for inviting me here today and I look forward to hearing your ideas.