

Speech by Commissioner Phil Hogan at EIP-AGRI Seminar

- "Promoting creativity and learning through agricultural knowledge systems and interactive innovation"

**Friday 4th December 2015, City North Hotel,
Gormanston, Co Meath, Ireland**

- Check Against Delivery –

(Introduction)

- Ladies and Gentlemen,
- It is a real pleasure to attend this very important 2-day conference on **how we can improve knowledge flows in European agriculture.**

- I would like to thank all the Irish and European delegates for their excellent presentations.
- In particular, I want to thank my colleagues Inge Van Oost and Mark Redman from the European Commission who are consistently superb on this topic.
- I'd also like to thank Tom Kelly from Teagasc – as some of you may know, long before I was appointed European Agriculture Commissioner, my father was regularly visited by Teagasc advisors on our family farm in Kilkenny, and my adviser Tom Tynan who is with me here today began his career working as an Agricultural Advisor in Ireland, and subsequently served on the board of Teagasc.
- **Above all, I want to thank the farmers who took time out of their busy lives to share their experiences with us.** We often say that new ideas are developed "on the ground" – well, farmers and agri-businesses take this concept literally: they grow and test their ideas on the ground and sometimes in the ground! And that is the most valuable experience of all.

- Take one woman from Italy – she explained that while she uses online platforms such as hackathons and social media to find information, some of her most precious ideas came from face-to-face exchanges with older farmers, whose traditions and skills are often second to none.
- Or a woman from Estonia – she shares knowledge with other farmers via **farmers unions, or workshops and brainstorming meetings organized by Latvia's Rural Economy Research Centre.**
- Or the Greek island agri start-up which participates in a **circle of farmers sharing their know-how between them.**
- Each of us in our own way is fully aware of the fact that knowledge is power - in agriculture as in every human endeavour.
- This conference has been all about bringing people together, listening to each other, learning from each other, and finding new and better ways to share the knowledge and expertise that will build the agriculture and food production of the 21st Century.

- Agriculture has always been an innovative sector and advisory services for farmers have always played a key role in making this happen.
- In the past, advisors were embedded in rural areas and knowledge transfer primarily involved farm visits and face to face contact. The intervening period has seen significant changes in how agricultural knowledge is transferred.
- What has not changed however, is that the knowledge gained from research must be communicated to farmers in a practical, helpful and visible way.
- In the past, it may have been sufficient to work out solutions in a research context and then pass them down to the farmer through advising in a so called linear knowledge transfer process.
- Nowadays we need all the brains we can get, be it scientific, organisational or practical to tackle the complex challenges we face.

- And we have to connect and enable all useful information sources, aiming to create cross-overs between sectors and disciplines. **We need to think outside the box if we want to keep agriculture competitive and rural areas vibrant.**
- **Knowledge is no good unless it can be used by those who benefit most from it.**
- There is no single solution to agricultural knowledge transfer that is applicable across the EU. It must be fine-tuned to national needs and regional needs and indeed to the needs of individual farmers.
- **As Commissioner, promoting innovation, collaboration and the efficient delivery of vital advisory services in agriculture are among my key priorities.**
- Farmers need timely access to knowledge and information, to training and education, and to facilitating and supporting services.

- Likewise, as policymakers we also need information on knowledge flows and the role which each part of the agricultural system plays in spreading knowledge, driving innovation and positively impacting the farmers' decision-making process.
- Thanks to the PRO-AKIS project, we are more aware of the tremendous variety of so-called Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems in Europe.
- **And I don't mind repeating that as an Irishman, I am proud to note that Ireland's best practice in a number of advisory areas is something many of Europe's Member States can learn from.**
- The PRO-AKIS project was proposed by the Commission in 2011, and was financed to inform the launch of the European Innovation Partnership on Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability.
- Through this very first study on agricultural knowledge and innovation systems in the 28 EU Member States, we now have a rough inventory of Member States' advisory services and AKIS systems.

- However, we are aware that this is just the tip of the iceberg, and the project results will now form the basis for further work within the EIP and future Horizon 2020 work programmes.
- Our aim is simple: we need to develop improved knowledge flows within Europe, because **knowledge is no good unless it can be used by those who benefit most from it.**
- **The future agriculture will be an agriculture of knowledge.** Not only research, but also advisory services, demonstration farms, farmers' organisations and networks are at the heart of these changes. **But we need to make sure we get it right.**
- So it is worthwhile, indeed it is necessary, to stand back and assess how each part of the AKIS system fits into this future agriculture, and see what we can do to improve tasks and roles, as well as linkages and knowledge flows.

(CAP's engagement in advisory services)

- The Commission's engagement towards AKIS is relatively recent, but we've made a big effort to make up for any lost time.

- Starting in 2005, the Farm Advisory System was introduced as a new part of the CAP. It was a major component of the 2003 Common Agricultural Policy Reform.
- All member states were obliged to put in place a Farm Advisory System from 2007 to enable their farmers to get advice on cross-compliance, fulfilling those requirements to avoid financial penalties.
- Once all national FAS systems were in place, an evaluation study as well as intensive discussions with Member States took place to prepare the 2010 Commission Communication. **This concluded that the system could be improved.**
- As a result, the 2013 horizontal CAP regulation expanded the scope of the FAS beyond cross compliance and entitled all European farmers to access advisory services on greening, climate change issues, pesticide use, biodiversity, the water framework directive and also on innovation, in particular.
- The main beneficiaries of the FAS have been larger farmers already familiar with the existing advisory services. **So reaching the smaller farmer remains the key challenge.**

- The new rural development rules made the existing supports more tailored to farmers' needs. An obligation for advisors to be suitably qualified and regularly trained was also introduced. Rural development support for the training of advisors was added to the existing support package.
- Greater resources are being made available under Pillar 2, to support the provision of farm advice. **Presentation and communication skills in addition to a clear understanding of the needs of farmers thus become as important among farm advisors as knowledge of innovation itself.**

(Innovation under Horizon 2020 & EIP)

- Nowadays it is clear that our complete agriculture innovation system needs to be strengthened, further developed and interlinked.
- The Rural Development Programmes up to 2020 will directly support innovation, close collaboration and networking.

- The acceptance and increased uptake of CAP agri-environmental measures is a success story – the measures are generally well accepted by farmers and the outcome is valued by Society. **Agricultural advisors across Europe have been the key catalysts behind the success of these programmes.**
- There is however more and more evidence that the links between research, advisory services, farmers and industry are still too weak and that agricultural knowledge and innovation systems need to be more efficient and interactive.
- **In other words, our agricultural innovation system needs to be strengthened, further developed and interlinked. There is a pressing need to do more. And there is massive potential for enhancing farmers' incomes and livelihoods when we do so.**
- New tools have been put on the table for 2014 to 2020. The agricultural European Innovation Partnership, the EIP AGRI, is a major policy and networking initiative designed to speed up innovation on the ground.

- The idea behind the EIPs is that they should provide favourable conditions for cooperation between research and innovation partners in order to achieve better and faster results compared to existing approaches.
- The aim, as mentioned earlier, is to foster a competitive and sustainable sector **which produces more using less**. The EIP AGRI will foster interactive innovation both under rural development and under the shared EU research policies.
- I am delighted that a large majority of Member States decided to take up the EIP approach in their rural development programmes. Around 90 Member States and regions will be implementing this plan, and more than 3000 Operational Groups will start up projects in the 2014-2020 period.
- This is a very positive and progressive development. We will develop linkages between them with the help of the EIP-AGRI network and the national rural networks.
- And I want to remind you that the Commission is ambitiously backing innovation and research in the agri-food sector, notably through the €3.6bn available between now and 2020 to fund synergies between Agriculture and Research, via Horizon 2020.

- I have also been working closely with the European Investment Bank to explore the possibility of establishing a dedicated agricultural Fund.
- The idea is that Member States and regions could adapt and use the model to set up financial instruments funded by their rural development programmes (RDPS) to secure loans for investments in farm performance, processing and marketing, business start-ups and many other areas.
- Under Horizon 2020, more interactive innovation is envisaged through the new concept of **multi-actor projects**. Research project consortia must include key actors with practical experience in the subject such as advisors, farmers, farm organisations, coops and businesses.
- **And they must be included in the process at every stage of the project.** The objective is to integrate practical knowledge as building blocks for research and innovation.
- For us, **innovation is "an idea, put into practice, with success"**.

- Both the operational group approach and the multi-actor approach will enable bottom-up ideas to develop from farmers and foresters, who will then create co-ownership, making the solutions more ready to use and speeding up the acceptance of innovative project results within the agricultural sector.
- As one Greek farmer explained: currently, "innovation happens accidentally in different sectors with no real communication between them". So we need to bring the different actors together in projects and make them cross-fertilize their knowledge and approaches.
- In the first two years 140 million Euro have been invested in the multi-actor approach and I can tell you that we will more than double this in the work programme for 2016-2017.
- We will attribute up to 370 million Euro in 38 multi-actor themes, including hot topics such as food security, integrating logistics and value chains, smart farming technologies, the combat of aggressive pests and diseases, water management and the resilience of farming systems.

- The preparation of this seminar began by asking farmers their view on knowledge flows: where do they find inspiration, can they access the knowledge they need, who supports them to develop new ideas and take up innovative approaches?
- **We were very glad to get your expert feedback on this through the submissions you provided.**
- Many of the farmers told us that they find the existing knowledge systems lacking because they do not reach them.
- One Italian farmer said it is not hard to find the theoretical knowledge she needs, but that it is still hard to find the practical knowledge and know-how you need for farming.
- Another Italian respondent said that "education is routine, schools are only teaching standard knowledge, advisors come strictly from business and more marketing than information is coming from industry". Another writes that 'the hard thing is to select among all the information that is available'.
- The farmers who sent us their stories are calling for more knowledge exchange and sharing, and to incentivise contact between the links of the value chain.

- We are aware of this and we are trying to make a difference. Of course this will not happen overnight, but we are starting up an important new initiative to get practical knowledge closer to those who need it: we call this "**practice abstracts**".
- These will mirror the concept of research abstracts – using concise and easy-to-read summaries, but will serve an audience of practitioners and will try to bring in audio-visual materials because farmers learn with their eyes.
- As one farmer from Italy put it: farmers "are especially glad to see (via photos, YouTube, or in person) how other people with similar situations handle daily things". The practice abstracts will support knowledge flows in the agricultural world on practical topics, according to the needs of farmers themselves.
- Because projects always come to an end, be it after one or 4 years, a lot of information and knowledge from gets lost and is not shared between European regions and countries.
- To improve this situation, all multi-actor research projects and all operational groups will be requested to share their practical information in understandable "farmer's" language.

- This will all feed into the EIP web database and the so-called "practice abstracts" will form a critical mass of innovative practices and techniques freely available in the longer term.
- The sustainable intensification of agriculture can only be achieved through real improvements to the EU and Member State knowledge transfer systems. Providing more effective advice to farmers will strengthen the adoption of best practice, leading to both economic and environmental benefits.
- New approaches need to be developed to enhance advisors' potential to boost innovation, by connecting science and practice. The use of new ICT advisory tools is an obvious example in providing more accurate and timely advice. Advisors can capture grass-roots innovative ideas from practice.

(Conclusion)

- Ladies and gentlemen, I am convinced that farmers, foresters, advisors and advisory systems will profit from the EU supports and structures available between 2014 and 2020. These will strengthen knowledge flows between science and practice, and begin lighting the path to the Agriculture of Knowledge we all hope to achieve.

- Let me conclude by once again thanking everyone for your testimony, for your ideas, for your energy and for your enthusiasm.
- Working together, we can boldly and confidently step up to the plate and meet these challenges head on.
- You have shown us how smart ideas and good advice can have a real impact on the ground, and indeed in the ground.
- For my part, I want to repeat the message that the Commission wants to make these changes happen, and my door is always open if you have new ideas or suggestions in relation to how our existing programmes can be improved.
- Thank you.