

Crop rotation and increased legume cultivation are essential for future farming

Experts outline that sustainable cropping systems can deliver multiple benefits for farmers and society

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Brussels, 30 May 2012 – Friends of the Earth Europe [1], the IFOAM EU Group [2], and the Pesticide Action Network Europe [3] organised a conference on “Crop Rotation and Legume Production: Cultivating a More Sustainable and Resource Efficient Farming Policy” in the European Parliament on the 29 May 2012, in cooperation with S&D MEP Karin Kadenbach and Green MEP Martin Häusling. The conference brought together agricultural scientists, farmers and other stakeholders to address the contribution of crop rotation and legume cultivation in lifting the environmental performance and economic resilience of European farming. With the European Parliament and the Council currently considering the Commission’s proposals on the reform of the CAP, including the introduction of crop diversification as a mandatory measure through the “greening component”, this conference comes at a crucial point in the legislative process on the CAP.

MEP Martin Häusling said that over the last number of decades crop rotation has become an exception rather than the rule on farms in many countries across the EU. Referring to a report [4] commissioned by his office in 2011 he outlined that in the last 10 years the production of leguminous crops in the EU had dropped by 30% and today only 3% of EU crop land. Instead the EU imports 40 million tons of protein crops mainly soy every year, equalling 20 million hectares of arable land, to meet its demand for protein livestock feed. He stressed that it was essential to ensure the long-term viability of farming in the EU by designing effective CAP greening measures that make agronomic sense for farmers.

Christine Watson, Leader of the Soil Team at the Scottish Agricultural College, explained the environmental benefits of crop rotation and legume cultivation. She highlighted that policymakers need a more temporal approach (crop rotation) to cropping systems rather than the spatial approach (crop diversification) as envisaged under the current proposals. She emphasised that with good planning and knowledge exchange crop rotation can not only decrease input costs, but reduce the risk for farmers by contributing to weed control and limiting dependency on inputs. She challenged policymakers to place long term benefits rather than short term gains at the heart of farm policy.

Anouk Cormont, Researcher at Wageningen University, illustrated the potential of domestic legume cultivation for livestock feed on arable and mixed farms in four regions in the Netherlands and Germany. She outlined that a study [5] conducted by her team looking at the income of farmers in these regions found that allocating 20% of arable land for grain legume cultivation could deliver many benefits. Moreover, in two of the regions cultivation would lead to increased income, while in the other two regions the loss of income would require relatively small compensation of about 19

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euro per hectare through CAP support. She explained that current CAP direct payments were not taken into account in the income calculation. She added that their study clearly demonstrated the fact that legume cultivation can reduce input dependency.

Christoph Dahlmann, project manager with the German small farmers association ABL in North-Rhine Westphalia argued that if Europe is going to respond to the current challenge of filling the gap of Europe's protein feed deficit, crop rotation and increased legume cultivation need to be fully embraced. He said it is now time for the EU to shift towards more sustainable cropping systems under the new greening component within the CAP, and support farmers who incorporate legumes into their cropping systems by encouraging more research, breeding programmes and training in order to develop even more sophisticated systems in the future.

Finally concluding the conference proceedings **Antje Kölling, Policy Manager for the IFOAM EU Group**, insisted that European agricultural policy must shift agriculture towards full sustainability by 2020. Echoing comments made by a number of the panel experts she said "The CAP must make crop rotation the rule, incentivise legumes in the cropping system, and moreover actively support sustainable cropping systems that deliver continuously higher results in terms sustainability, such as practices applied in organic farming and HNV farming".

[ends]

Information for Journalists

Presentations from conference will soon be available [online](#).

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Notes

[1] Friends of the Earth Europe is the largest grassroots environmental network in Europe, uniting 30 national organisations with thousands of local groups. <http://www.foeeurope.org/agriculture>

[2] The IFOAM EU Group represents more than 300 member organisations of IFOAM (International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements) in the EU-27, the EU accession countries and EFTA. Member organisations include: consumer, farmer and processor associations; research, education and advisory organisations; certification bodies and commercial organic companies. <http://www.ifoam-eu.org/workareas/policy/php/CAP.php>

[3] PAN Europe is a network of campaign NGOs working to minimise negative effects and replace the use of hazardous chemicals with ecologically sound alternatives. PANE works to eliminate dependency on chemical pesticides and to support safe sustainable pest control practices. <http://www.pan-europe.info/>

[4] Artenvielfalt statt Sojawahn, Eiweißmangel in der EU: Wie lässt sich das seit langem bestehende Problem lösen? (2011) http://www.martin-haeusling.de/attachments/137_Proteinbroschuere_Haeusling_05sep11_klein.pdf

[5] Cormont, A., Janssen, S., Uiterwijk, M. (Wageningen UR) commissioned by Friends of the Earth Europe (2012): The potential for European legumes production: Effects for the farmers (in publication)