

COGECA PRESIDENCY BUSINESS FORUM
“Agri-food and forestry cooperatives heading towards climate neutrality”

16 September 2020
15:00 – 17:20

Speaking note to the attention of the Cogeca [REDACTED], [REDACTED]
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Dear distinguished guests, cooperative leaders and executives,

Dear colleagues, dear friends, ladies and gentlemen.

Welcome to the Cogeca Presidency Business Forum.

It is a great honor to deliver this welcome message as representative of more than 22.000 European cooperatives operating in the agri-food, fishery and forestry sectors.

I would like to start my brief intervention by underlining some elements related to the so called “cooperative difference”.

Our enterprises have more than 7 million farmer-members. The farmers are the owners of the cooperative enterprises and they are representatively involved in the development of the strategies of the enterprises.

This is central and not a negligible difference with the other enterprises operating in the food supply chain.

Farmers’ needs have always been the driving force behind the business development of our enterprises.

And, the needs deriving from the challenges linked to the transition towards a more sustainable sector will be driving agri-cooperatives strategic development and innovation.

On the basis of the economic, social and environmental challenges that our farmers face, agri-cooperatives are already heading towards climate neutrality. Today we will discover together some examples and strategic orientations to do so.

By definition, European agri-cooperatives’ strategies are based on a successful model in which business efficiency is combined with the values of solidarity, responsibility and social cohesion.

We have principles that tell us what the agri-cooperatives stand for, in good and bad times.

As we demonstrated throughout the centuries, as well as today during these exceptional times we are living in, during which we face economic and social disruption due to the current pandemic crisis, Agri-cooperatives are the most suitable and advanced tool to respond to farmers organisational needs.

The climate related risks, that as farmers we need to cope with, are at the basis of a transition that our cooperative are driving.

For this reason, together with my colleagues of the Cogeca Presidency, we have decided to organise this forum. The objective is to showcase how agri-cooperatives promote sustainable farming practices, driving the sector towards the ambitious goals of the climate neutrality.

With a new EU 2050 climate ambition, European agri-cooperatives are taking the next big steps towards a more sustainable agri-food and forestry sector and a carbon net zero value chain.

We will see today how our strategies cover the whole value chain from primary production through to consumers. European agri-cooperatives know the impact of their own operations from the farm to the supermarket shelf, and want to be part of the solution.

We certainly recognise the importance of becoming even more efficient and taking every available opportunity to reduce emissions, implement adaptation actions and develop climate-resilient business models.

The main reason is linked to the fact that, as Cooperatives' farmer-members, we are first in line in terms of the climate change impact and must cope with the increased costs of adaptation and mitigation.

These increased cost will reflect on the business development of our enterprises. Yes, farmers can count on the support of our agri-food cooperatives that are investing and already adapting their business models to mitigate the risks deriving from these regulatory and not-regulatory initiatives.

However, our enterprises needs to be agile, have a long term vision to cope with economic, environmental, social and governance risks. Today's event is designed to share experience and learn from each other on how to empower farmers and become climate resilient and grasp the opportunities linked to the long-termism of our schemes.

Today, I also would like to stress that given the political ambitions of Europe to become the world's first climate-neutral continent, policy makers need to follow a holistic approach when setting targets.

They should consider that our farmer-members and cooperative enterprises need to be equipped with the right toolbox which should be developed hand in hand with cutting-edge scientific progress. It is key to have available, safe, effective and affordable tools.

I would also like to underline that as our cooperatives operate and compete on the global markets, we expect that the EU will reduce the competitive disadvantages

that exist today in relation to production methods outside the EU. It is moreover essential to protect the high European standards that are internationally recognised as being among the best in the world.

Before I conclude, I would like to thank all Cogeca members for their daily work. In this political climate, in fact, it is of paramount importance to explain the importance and the strength of our enterprises in supporting European farmers, from farm to fork, not only in their transition towards a more sustainable agri-food sector, but also in driving the digital transition and involving farmers in the circular and bio-economy.

Our business models need to take into consideration several elements. The success is not linked to a single one. For us what it counts is “our planet, our people, our market”.

We look at the market, we listen to our farmer-members, we analyse consumers’ expectations, we look at the political ambitions of the European Union with the “Green Deal” and, yes..... we see clearly that farmers’ cooperation can deliver on many arising climate challenges.

However, there is always an element that we will never stop to mention. Whichever target we need to achieve, it needs to be scientific-based and market oriented.

These are *condicio sine qua non* for the adaptation of our business models. We will never be able to deliver on goals that are not backed by scientific and sound economic analysis.

To the contrary, with the correct scientific and economic assumptions, our enterprises not only will ride consumers trends, they will innovate and ultimately create new markets, products and services.

As explained by the Business Fora Coordinator, we are gathered today to share successful experiences and strategies.

I am sure that the presentations that will follow from my colleagues, not only will underline that we are already delivering on many objectives of the Green deal.

They will also underline that, when it comes to climate neutrality, the ambitions of our cooperatives companies can be even higher of the one set at political level, because they are based on 1) the principles and values we all shares, 2) the needs of our farmer-members 3) market analysis and 4) scientific evidence.

Thank you very much and I wish you all a good meeting.