

EU40 leads debate towards policies to incorporate the social and economic pillars for a sustainable livestock farming in Europe

Event report: Economic and social pillars of sustainable livestock production

EU40, the network of young Members of the European Parliament, organised a debate entitled “Economic and social pillars of sustainable livestock production” where attendees addressed how to incorporate the social and economic pillars –besides the environmental one - when talking about sustainable livestock production in Europe.

The debate was hosted by MEP Franc Bogovic (EPP), MEP Michela Giuffrida (S&D) and MEP Daniel Dalton (ECR).

Other partners and speakers included:

- Louis Mahy, Unit H.5 Research & Innovation, DG AGRI, European Commission
- Stefan Ryba, General Director for Agriculture, Ministry of Agriculture of the Slovak Republic
- Richard Brown, Director of Gira Consultancy and Research participated as panelists.
- Jannes Maes, Vice-President of CEJA (the European Council of Young Farmers)
- Dr. Dirk-Jan Verdonk, Head of Programmes, World Animal Protection Netherlands
- Luc Mirabito, Project Leader, Institute L’Elevage (French Livestock Institute)
- Roxane Feller, Secretary General of IFAH-Europe (International Federation for Animal Health Europe)

On a keynote, **Louis Mahy** explained the business opportunities for the livestock sector in a biocircular economy. He also highlighted that a digital revolution is needed for a sustainable livestock sector.

Stefan Ryba highlighted the need to keep the livestock sector competitive and attractive, especially for young farmers. It is about supporting investment and modernisation in connection with the promotion of science and research.

Economic pillar

MEP Franc Bogovic (EPP), a former Minister of Agriculture in his country Slovenia, emphasised that we committed ourselves to reaching climate goals, but we still need to keep our livestock sector competitive and even more important, preserve jobs in the branch. In his view, it is not only about making intensive farming more environmentally friendly, but the EU should also support finding alternative strategies for the sector, like the creation of market brands and connecting livestock producers with other services like tourism.

MEP Daniel Dalton (ECR) brought out that if we don’t get the economics right out there we are not going to be sustainable from an environmental and social point of view. He stressed that we need to look at exports, global markets and free trade and we need to be innovative and attract young people into the sector.

Richard Brown showed the market trends for the meat sector and the factors that affect prices. EU farms are small and fragmented compared to other countries. For him, farmers need to reduce costs. They can also differentiate, but with an eye on costs and embracing technology to stay competitive.

For Jannes Maes it is crucial that farmers get a fair share of the price. Moreover, R&D and innovation at farm level has to make sure that farmers are more efficient in their production and through that making sure that they have a higher income and they can put some money aside.

Social pillar

On animal welfare, **MEP Michela Giuffrida (S&D)** underlined that more quality and more respect for the health and welfare of farm animals should not mean more bureaucracy, more forms to fill in and more procedures to follow. The challenge is to communicate with businesses and foster a climate of cooperation between individuals and institutions. Disease prevention, responsible medicine use and affordable solutions are needed for a sustainable livestock sector.

For **Dirk-Jan Verdonk**, different models of livestock farming have different challenges and therefore need different responses. If farms increase productivity, innovation and best practices are key to sustain animal welfare and environmental aspects. Dr. Verdonk stressed that it is very important to integrate all the different dimensions (pillars) of sustainability, including the animal welfare aspects. The EU has a big role here to develop policies that can help and support that integration. Partnerships, multi-stakeholder platforms and public policies were suggested by him as the way forward.

Luc Mirabito talked about the importance of providing the animals with adequate care and resource, as well as monitoring the outcome. For him, outcome based measures are the future of animal welfare management, but farmers need guidelines and recommendations as a basis for investment and management.

Roxane Feller stressed that healthy animals are key for a sustainable future. Thanks to the use of veterinary medicines, Europe has been successful in preventing and managing critical animal diseases. Nevertheless, livestock diseases still amount to a loss of 20% in production globally. Ensuring a wide access to veterinary medicines and encouraging innovation in this sector can directly impact livestock production by preventing losses that could otherwise jeopardise the sustainability and economic viability of farms, whilst helping to ensure that the best use is made of resources like, animal feed, water, labour and logistics.

Regarding the importance of livestock for our rural communities, **MEP Bogovic** highlighted that we need to keep livestock in remote, mountain areas through quality, origin marketing and product diversification. **Jannes Maes** expressed that young farmers need to combine technology with tradition.

On the welfare of farmers and other livestock actors, Louis Mahy hopes projects and programs sponsored by the European Commission in research and innovation will contribute to a better picture of the sector. Stefan Ryba mentioned that improving the social perception of livestock production is critical for the sustainability of the sector. This topic will be covered in the last and third EU event later this year. The next debate will be taking place on the 29th of November at the European Parliament and will focus on the way forward, towards a sustainable EU livestock sector.

The EU livestock sector accounts for 42% of total EU agricultural activity, with an estimated €145bn output value annually and creates employment for almost 30 million people.

This debate is the second of a trilogy organised by EU40. The trilogy aims at underlying the importance of livestock specific actions as part of the current discussion on the need for innovation for a sustainable EU agricultural sector.

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