

Commissioner Phil Hogan

Address at Opening of Wageningen University Academic Year

3rd September 2018

– Check Against Delivery –

Intro

- Prime-Minister Rutte, Professor Fresco, Professor Mol, ladies and gentlemen,
- As always it's a pleasure to be in the Netherlands to speak about agriculture. A country that proudly carries the title of second biggest exporter of agricultural produce in the world. The agricultural and horticultural sectors play a crucial role in this country, accounting for 10% of the Dutch economy and employment.
- I'm very happy to be back at Wageningen University. I am particularly honoured to be here in the year of your 100th anniversary, which is a tremendous achievement.
- I regularly reference the fact that in Europe "we have some of the world's leading agriculture research institutes, with decades of expertise" – and Wageningen ranks number one in the world in the field of Agriculture & Forestry.
- The writer William Gibson famously observed that "the future is here. It is just not evenly distributed yet." As I saw during my visit to Wageningen in November 2016, your researchers and students are playing a central part in helping to create the future today, and then distribute it as widely as possible, for the benefit of all, not just for the Netherlands and the EU but all around the world.

- I want to make sure that policymakers, including those in the European Commission, are giving you all the opportunities and supports you need to do this vitally important work.
- As EU Commissioner for Agriculture, I view it as my mission to encourage young people such as yourselves to become farmers, farm advisers, to code or build better machines, to build new European companies and brands, to make rural areas vibrant and to "evenly distribute" the future.
- And contrary to what some people might tell you, under the Common Agricultural Policy we do have a policy for each and every one of those areas.
- I was born on a family farm in Ireland, and represented a rural area in the national Parliament and Government for over 27 years. So, I am aware of the contribution of agriculture to jobs, economies, public goods, from long years of direct experience. I am also aware of the long years of expertise and vocational training that the Netherlands offered farmers in Ireland and other EU countries to aim for the highest levels of productivity and farming excellence.
- Today I would like to tell you about our future plans for the CAP, and how our proposals can support a great leap forward for research and innovation in the agriculture and food space.

Current R&I Programmes

- And what better place to do this than in the Netherlands. The Dutch are at the forefront of agricultural innovation and understand better than anyone else the importance of research and innovation in this sector. These are exactly the values that I want to build into the future Common Agricultural Policy.

- Of course we are not starting from scratch. Already today, through the Horizon2020 programme, we support researchers; while the CAP supports training and installation for young people who want to get into farming, advice for all farmers, as well as services through a farm advisory system.
- The CAP provides money for innovative on-farm investments, for setting up new companies in rural areas, and for all of these people to work with each other and bring the newest solutions on-farm, through the European Innovation Partnership for Agriculture.
- The CAP has always been a frontrunner in using technology and this has contributed to it being one of the most successful EU policies. As the technology has improved, so too has policy implementation – and ambition.
- The CAP was the first to use aerial imagery and satellite imagery in its operational processes. It was the first community to deploy geographic information systems such as the Land Parcel Identification System at such scales.
- That success is reflected in high performance: Less than 2% of CAP Direct Payments expenditure is made in error.
- And more importantly, the CAP is achieving its goal of ensuring a livelihood for farmers and rural communities while maintaining food security – preserving the large variety of high quality, safe, and delicious products and culinary traditions we enjoy in Europe.
- These are real and meaningful steps. But now I believe we are ready to move things to the next level.

Future CAP – Satellite Technology

- You are all familiar with the scale of the challenge. The global population is increasing rapidly, while the pressure on our climate and environment is greater than ever before.
- Farmers play a crucial role in providing safe and high quality food for our citizens and they do this in dramatically changing climatic conditions as shown by the drought in central and northern Europe this summer.
- The severe drought experienced by many countries, including the Netherlands, has given us a timely reminder of the urgency of the crisis. The drought dried Dutch rivers and destroyed Dutch crops, mainly corn and potatoes. Farmers worked throughout the night to save anything they could and irrigate as much as possible.
- The European Commission took swift and decisive action to offer various supports and derogations to Member States, and I would like to thank the Dutch government for their constructive approach. Minister Carola Schouten and I have been in regular contact throughout July and August to find solutions for Dutch farmers.
- Europe stands behind our farmers by helping alleviate their immediate problems and, aware of the fact that such events will only become more frequent, accompanying them with better and more appropriate measures in the future as provided for in the CAP reform proposals. We need to address the bigger problem.
- Farming and food production needs to get smarter, cleaner, and greener – and fast. Farmers need to adopt new technologies as part of building climate resilience.
- We have been talking about precision agriculture and smart farming for many years already. Now we need to take it to the European mainstream, and the CAP needs to lead the charge. Let me offer just a few examples of where we need to ramp things up.

- Europe now has the world's most comprehensive, high performance, civil constellation of Earth imaging satellites - the Copernicus Sentinels. These offer significant new sources of data for key CAP tasks such as yield forecasts, as well as new priorities such as improved performance monitoring.
- We have world class navigation and positioning with Galileo.
- We have the capacity to handle big data in the cloud.
- And we have an active, creative and productive scientific community advancing the use of Artificial Intelligence.
- These technologies help us confront the paradox: the new CAP has more demands placed on it than ever before, yet paradoxically it must also deliver simpler implementation, and implementation targeted to more local conditions.
- Technology can help our key stakeholders, both farmers and administrations, to avoid complexity, AND keep financial assurance at the same high level as before.
- Technology can help to build systems based on results – we can actually observe and measure progress.
- Administrators and farmers will get warnings – not notices of non-compliance.
- Farmers will not be checked by sampling – everyone is treated the same, so it is fairer.
- And crucially, farmers and administrators will not have to spend hours and days filling in forms and dealing with unwanted officials visiting their land.

- In this way, technology can deliver a simpler, better-targeted and better performing EU agri-food production system.

Future CAP – Digitization

- It is also high time that EU agriculture policy gets serious about digitisation.
- Tim O'Reilly, the visionary who famously promoted the terms “open source software” and “Web 2.0” said that governments should stop trying to be vending machines for punctual solutions to problems and turn instead into facilitators, into platforms where everyone's agency is welcome, where solutions are found collectively, where knowledge is built through practical engagement in solving each other's problems.
- It is in this light that the European Commission is advancing policies to facilitate increased digitization. For agriculture, this means that we are investing in new technologies; including digital tools; that will help the farmer to save both time and money while at the same time optimizing yields.

Horizon Europe

- Of course, lofty words must be matched with resources. In other words, the EU needs to put its money where its mouth is. And I am pleased to say that we have done exactly that.
- For the EU budget 2021-2027, the Commission is proposing €100 billion for Horizon Europe - the most ambitious research and innovation programme ever.
- **Of this, 10 billion is dedicated to Food and Agriculture: this is a real breakthrough.**

- **I will work closely with my colleague Commissioner for Innovation and Research, Carlos Moedas, to ensure that these funds contribute to more innovative and circular food systems.**
- There will also be a far stronger synergy between Horizon & CAP: Two key elements will contribute to the research and innovation agenda:
- MS will be required to make available to farmers a system of Farm Advisory Services, which will include advice on all the requirements and conditions at farm level related to the CAP Strategic Plans, such as how to ensure compliance with environmental legislation on water, pesticides, and clean air; how to improve risk management; and how to access innovation and technology.
- The second element is to encourage generational renewal and to bring a more technology-focused generation into the sector. Young farmers will benefit from a number of measures, some mandatory, others voluntary.

CAP Strategic Plans

- Last, I would like to tell you about the key reform of our proposal for the future CAP: the new delivery model for achieving better results.
- Under the new delivery model, each MS will design a CAP Strategic Plan: put simply this is an integrated policy roadmap explaining how they will reach their agreed targets and deliver their agreed results. The Commission will approve and support each of those plans.
- There are 9 key policy objectives that MS must meet in their CAP Strategic Plan: knowledge and innovation is one of these. And generational renewal is another.

- In other words, each MS must outline in detail how they propose to boost research and innovation, and support generational renewal, in their agri-food sector over the 7 year budget period.
- The new system will deliver real, measurable results. For example, I have long signalled the need for the next CAP to show a higher level of environmental and climate ambition in line with the expectations of our citizens. I believe that farmers are crucial to meeting our sustainability goals.
- The Commission's proposal delivers on that belief. Actions under the CAP are expected to contribute 40 per cent of the overall CAP budget to climate mainstreaming.

Conclusion

- Ladies and gentlemen, I am proposing to put the provision of high quality food at the centre of the European Agricultural Policy post 2020. This means that the CAP will contribute to food security for consumers, but also benefits in relation to sustainability, energy and climate action, trade, the circular economy, the bio economy, the digital economy, rural jobs and rural viability, and our precious food culture and traditions.
- And with the help of new technology and innovation, we will protect our own natural resources, as well as deploying those technologies to Africa and elsewhere to help feed the growing population of the world.
- These are important policy areas for any government and should not be taken for granted in any EU Member State. The only group of people that can achieve these policy objectives for all of us are well trained farmers – the type of people that are educated and trained here in Wageningen University.

- Those professional farmers must be paid a reasonable income to do this critically important work and therefore it is necessary to be mindful of a well-funded EU Common Agricultural Policy. We should not take for granted this successful policy.
- Let me conclude by thanking you once more for inviting me here today. Thank you, and the best of luck for this academic year!