

Draft speech

'Prospects for Farmers' support: Advisory Services in European AKIS'

May 19, 2015

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to give the opening address at today's conference and I want to thank Andrea for this invitation.

My name is Tom Tynan and I am a member of Commissioner Phil Hogan's Cabinet. My life's work has been dedicated to the agricultural sector. I grew up on a dairy farm and spent the first eight years of my professional life working as an Agricultural Advisor in Ireland.

Agriculture has always been an innovative sector and advisory services for farmers have played a key role in this.

Innovation in agriculture is a key priority in Commissioner Hogan's mandate.

Prior to joining the EU Commission last November I was very fortunate to serve on the board of Teagasc, the national body in Ireland providing integrated research, advisory and training services to farmers, the food industry and rural communities.

I believe there is a very strong AKIS in Ireland mainly due to the central role of Teagasc and its innovation around discussion groups and demonstration farms.

My three decades plus of experience in the agricultural industry coupled with my Teagasc involvement has taught me the following lesson above all: that farmers need timely access to knowledge and information, to training and education and to facilitating and supporting services.

Likewise as policy makers we need information on the role agricultural advisors play in agricultural knowledge and innovation and in the farmers' decision making processes.

The future agriculture will be an agriculture of knowledge. Today, at the final conference of the PRO-AKIS project, it is good to stand back

and assess how advisors fit into this future agriculture, see how AKIS will work and what we can do to improve linkages.

Today's findings will form the basis for future Horizon 2020 work programmes.

Ladies and Gentlemen, when I was a practising agronomist, 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.

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.

Agriculture will need to construct novel, diversified solutions and make use of emerging opportunities, and advisors should get involved in interactive innovation processes.

Agriculture as we know faces a global challenge. The world's population, now around 7 billion, is expected to grow to in excess of 9 billion by 2050. Close on 870 million people are chronically hungry in the world today and UN statistics are showing that 2.5 million children die of hunger each year.

In response to these challenges, agricultural production must increase – to feed those extra mouths, to keep prices down and to respond to world-wide demand for better nutrition.

Over the next 40 years global food production must double.

Higher output has to be achieved using finite resources. The world cannot afford to release new land for farming. Put simply, we need to do more, using less.

We need our forests and our wildernesses to absorb the carbon dioxide which we create.

Yield growth needs to be realised with less water, less fertiliser and less chemicals.

Mitigating climate change also means that farmers must reduce their use of fossil fuels, and change practices that contribute to greenhouse gases.

Innovative agriculture should ensure the protection of natural resources, biodiversity, landscape, soil and water and increase the environmental and climate benefits that farming provides.

The message is therefore clear, the role of the agricultural advisor is more critical today than it ever was.

When the Commission proposed this PRO AKIS topic in 2011 in the 7th Framework Programme we were already well aware of the crucial role of advice in agriculture.

The Commission started its engagement towards advisory services in 2005, by introducing the Farm Advisory System as a new part of the CAP. It was a major component of the 2003 Common Agricultural Policy Reform.

In 2007 all member states were obliged to put in place a Farm Advisory System to enable their farmers to get advice on cross-compliance, fulfilling those requirements to avoid financial penalties.

Once all member states FAS systems were in place in 2009, the FAS evaluation study showed that the system could be improved.

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 innovation.

The main beneficiaries of the FAS have been larger farmers already familiar with the existing advisory services. Reaching the smaller farmer remains the key challenge.

The new rural development rules made the support for advice 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 the innovation itself.

Today we will find out more about the results of PRO AKIS. The project has undertaken a comprehensive study of agricultural knowledge and innovation systems in 27 EU Member States.

It has been financed by the EU to inform the launch of the European Innovation Partnership on Agriculture productivity and sustainability.

Our agriculture innovation system needs to be strengthened, further developed and interlinked.

The Rural Development Programmes for 2014-2020 will engage in supporting innovation, close collaboration and networking.

The acceptance and increased uptake of CAP agri-environmental measures is a success story – the measures are 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, advice, farmers and industry are still too weak and that agricultural knowledge and innovation systems need to be more efficient and interactive.

New tools have been put on the table for 2014 to 2020. EIP AGRI is a major policy and networking initiative 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 that achieves more from less.

Commissioner Hogan is delighted that a big majority of member states decided to take up the EIP approach in their RDPs to be financed under the 2014 to 2020 CAP, and advisors should play a major role in the EIP Operational Groups.

Once the RDP programmes are adopted, funding will become available for EIP Agri Innovation projects that look at tackling specific practical issues.

Through Horizon 2020 we have doubled our efforts on food, agriculture, forestry and marine research to reach E3.6 billion for the period 2014 to 2020.

Also more interaction is envisaged through the new concept of multi actor projects. In the first two years E150 million have been invested in this approach.

Consortia must include key actors with practical experience in the subject such as advisors and advisory services, farmers, farm organisations, researchers, coops and businesses.

The objective is to strengthen participation of farmers and advisors in research and innovation. We will need to explore the best ways to engage advisors in forming part of these operational groups and multi actor projects.

We will deepen the knowledge base in soil fertility, plant and animal health and the role of biodiversity.

The two key words in agricultural policy today are sustainable intensification. Over one third of globally produced food gets lost

or wasted every year, an amount big enough to feed 2 billion people.

The sustainable intensification of the CAP can only be achieved on the basis of real improvements to the EU and Member States knowledge transfer systems. **More effective advice to farmers will strengthen the adoption of best practice which will have 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, are, an obvious example in providing more accurate and timely advice. Advisors can capture grass-roots innovative ideas from practice.

This is why the findings of this project are so important to all of us as we plot the policy course over the coming years.

In conclusion I am convinced that advisors and advisory systems will profit from the EU Framework 2014 to 2020. This will strengthen knowledge flows between science and practice.

Rethinking agriculture should make farming an income generating and attractive job which young people want to commit to.

Worldwide more than half of our farmers are over 55 years of age.

Remember, every 20 years the number of people who depend on one farmer doubles and the world's best performing farmers are about 100 times better than their least productive colleagues.

The main concern is not the land but the transfer of the knowledge.

New ways of interaction with advisors needs to be explored with the ultimate goal to improve knowledge flows in the AKIS which will allow us to tackle the many challenges I have just outlined.

To feed the world sustainably requires knowledge, adoption and implementation of both existing and new technologies and training to make sure the best practices are shared globally.

I will leave you with a quote from Oscar Wilde

"The only good thing to do with good advice is to pass it on; it is never of any use to oneself"

Thank you for your attention and I wish you a very productive and rewarding conference.

