

Farming in the cloud: Europe needs to speed up on the path towards connected agriculture

EU support essential to unleash the promise of digital farming

Brussels, 27 September 2016 – Agriculture is set for a digital revolution, and digital technologies feature among the most exciting and promising approaches to help farmers increase the sustainability, productivity and profitability of their operations in the years ahead. As such, Europe needs to find the right answers and policy concepts on how to best advance on the path towards connected agriculture.

These were two of the key conclusions from today's lunch debate "Agriculture 4.0 – Smart Farming in the cloud" organized by Europe's farm machinery association CEMA and hosted by the Representation of the Free State of Bavaria to the EU.

Debating the main benefits to be expected from digital farming, representatives from farm organisations, the European Institutions, and industry experts also discussed the question of what the EU can do to help farmers and technology providers to manage the change ahead.

In his opening speech, **Christoph Wigger**, Head of Sales and Marketing for Region 2 in John Deere, showed how farmers today can collect vast amounts of data about their fields and – thanks to digital farm management systems – pool different data streams to connect people, technology, equipment and insights in entirely new ways. "*The integration of different data streams*", he concluded, "*can, quite simply, help a good farm to be even better.*"

Focusing on the rapidly evolving technology developments in the farm machinery industry, **Maarten de Smet**, Precision Farming Manager France, CNH Industrial, underlined recent breakthroughs made in the development of fully autonomous tractors.

Pekka Pesonen, Secretary General of COPA-COGECA, emphasized two major challenges that would need to be addressed from the point of view of European farmers and farm cooperatives: "*We need to avoid a digital divide in agriculture and make sure farms of all sizes can benefit from this technology, from small family farms to large agribusinesses. In addition, adequate rural broadband infrastructure across the entire EU is an essential precondition for a successful and inclusive digital transformation in agriculture.*"

From the side of the European Commission, **Iman Boot**, Senior Expert Research & Innovation, DG AGRI, and **Juha Heikkilä**, Head of Unit, Robotics and Artificial Intelligence, DG CONNECT, explained how the EU is actively supporting the process of digitization in farming through the provision of strategic research funding in the areas of agriculture and robotics.

In terms of the EU's agricultural policy, Member of the European Parliament **Peter Jahr** stressed that "*the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has an important role to play in supporting the competitiveness of farmers and the uptake of innovation, which should also include digital innovation.*"

Richard Markwell, CEMA President, concluded calling on "*a coherent and forward-looking EU policy approach to support the truly transformative path in farming that lies ahead.*"

The lunch debate was accompanied by an exhibition on "Smart Agricultural Machines" that allowed participants to explore modern-day machinery and learn more about what farm management software systems can do in practice.

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CEMA (www.cema-agri.org) is the European association of agricultural machinery industry. The industry represented by CEMA includes 4,500 manufacturers of agricultural machinery. 135,000 persons directly work in this branch of business, 125,000 persons work indirectly in distribution and maintenance. The companies are mainly small and medium-sized manufacturers according to the EU definition and generated a total turnover of 27 billion euros in 2014.

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