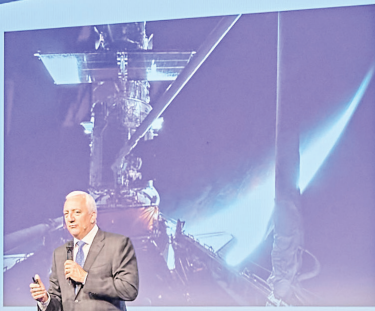




**Forum for
the Future
of Agriculture®**

 **Forum for the
Future of Agriculture®**
Annual Conference 2025

**Exploring new frontiers for
agri-food system transformation**



**Forum for the Future of Agriculture
2025 Annual Conference
Tuesday, April 1, 2025**

**Exploring new frontiers for agri-food
system transformation**

Session summaries

Exploring new frontiers for agri-food system transformation



“Farmers deserve even more attention and even more support. Exploring new frontiers of the agri-food system transformation, the substance leading our debates today, is thus a must.”

Janez Potočnik

Janez Potočnik, Chair ForumforAg 2025 and Chairman RISE Foundation, welcomed participants attending in person and on-line to the 2025 Annual Conference with its overarching theme: ‘Exploring new frontiers for agri-food system transformation’.

He noted that Europe is at a strategic crossroads. It faces two main alternatives: going defensive or becoming a well-recognised, listened to, strategic power. The latter requires greater fiscal, external and defence integration, free movement of knowledge and an economy based, not on ownership, but on access and sharing.

“The European Green Deal kickstarted EU-wide efforts for a very much-needed whole economy and society transformation,” he told the Forum’s 17th annual conference. The direction it set should remain “the North Star” for the future.

The current focus on new geostrategic realities and the need to strengthen Europe’s competitiveness, fairness and security cut across policy areas. All are important priorities. They must be integrated into the European Green Deal vision to ensure “a well-balanced systemic strategic approach”, since natural resources are the very foundation of our economies and societies.

The former European Commissioner cited a recent Global Resource Outlook report. This underlined that energy, food, the built environment and mobility provide four basic human needs. They account for 90% of all global material use. While those needs vary considerably across country income groups, food must be the top priority.

In the current climate, “farmers deserve even more attention and even more support. Exploring new frontiers of the agri-food system transformation, the substance leading our debates today, is thus a must,” he said.

Mr Potočnik welcomed the Commission’s Strategic Dialogue on the Future of Agriculture and Agriculture Commissioner Christophe Hansen’s recent Vision for the Future of Agriculture as key ingredients in the direction ahead.

Alongside these strategic documents, he referenced the Forum’s own Call to Action, now in its second year. This contains seven commitments to transform the agri-food system. The second emphasises the need to conserve and improve soil health. Later, the Forum demonstrated that commitment by presenting, for the first time, the annual award for soil and land management.

Out of this world perspective on agri-food system transformation

“*Despite our differences we can still agree to unite to solve our problems together. We’ve got to make this planet work. There is no Plan B.*”

Mike Massimino



Mike Massimino, former NASA Astronaut and Professor of Mechanical Engineering, Columbia University, started his inspirational talk by thanking the conference delegates for all their hard work in helping to feed the world and solve the problems facing the planet. He then went on to speak with passion about his time in space and explained how his unique experience provides important lessons and perspective that can be brought to bear when tackling the many challenges facing planet Earth.

Firstly, the mission is paramount and bigger than any individual. “If you keep that in mind, then you can cooperate no matter who it is you’re working with.” As an example, he pointed to the International Space Station where the US, Russia and six other countries, irrespective of any terrestrial tensions, collaborate closely on the common goal of space exploration.

“When you have that common bond, I think that overrules any differences you might have,” he said, adding: “and I would think the same is true for agriculture and growing food and solving all these problems”.

One should never lose sight of the big picture. “For me, it was the space programme that was my passion. For all of you feeding the world, solving a lot of the problems related to agriculture and keeping the world healthy and planet healthy, it is what you work on every day,” he told his audience.

From space, Earth acquires a whole new dimension. “It is perfect. It is beautiful. I can’t imagine anywhere more beautiful than planet Earth. This is what heaven must look like. At that moment, I felt I was looking into absolute paradise,” he said, describing his second spacewalk.

He emphasised the fragility of that paradise and the pressure being placed on the atmosphere which appears as an extremely thin blue line when photographed from space. “You can hardly see it. That is the only thing that’s keeping us alive. If you think of the Earth as an onion, the thin top layer of that onion is the size relationship of our atmosphere to the rest of the planet.”

While some thoughts turn to the possibility of life on the moon or Mars, the astronaut’s feet remain on the ground. Mike explained that he supports further moon exploration as ways to develop technologies to improve life on Earth. “I really think that leaving our planet is about preserving our planet. We’ve checked out the neighbourhood. We’ve got nowhere to go. We’ve got to make this planet work. There is no Plan B.”

Session 1 – Geopolitics – The reality of our fears



Opening the discussion at the start of the first session, Francis Malige, Managing Director of Financial Institutions, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), likened geopolitics to capital markets. “It’s all about pricing expectations.” When risk increases, prices fall. In his view, “It’s actually market choices that help us to make the right decision for the planet”. Fostering greater unity and confronting challenges together will enable Europe to thrive in the new geopolitical era. A capital markets and savings union are crucial, as they will provide the necessary capital for investment and innovation. Finishing on a positive note, Mr Malige noted: “The one thing that saves us is the ingenuity of mankind”.

“*The one thing that saves us is the ingenuity of mankind.*”

Francis Malige

Mairéad McGuinness, former European Commissioner for financial services, financial stability and Capital Markets Union & former First Vice-President, European Parliament, warned that fear can be “a crippling emotion”. It must not prevent our “capacity, not just in Europe, but globally, to do things, to innovate, to find solutions”.

Suggesting a new political slogan – Make Europe Great Again – she called for strong, calm, even boring leadership and counselled against over-analysis and over-reaction. She emphasised the real-world consequences of President Trump’s tariffs. “People will die because of this policy.” The former Commissioner called on national leaders in Europe to devote more attention to the EU, since the Union is where responses and solutions can be found. Faced with a rapidly changing world order, she insisted: “We have the capacity to change”.

In a later discussion on the Green Deal, she stressed that its objectives remained in place, “but I think the path will change”. The road ahead is likely to be less ideologically driven, more pragmatic and to focus on buy-in from farmers and environmental organisations.



“*It’s not about what we are going to do but when we are going to start taking action. The time to start was yesterday.*”

Mairéad McGuinness

Viorel Gutu, FAO Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative for Europe and Central Asia, sketched out the scale of challenges facing agri-food systems. Over 700 million people – 9% of the world's population – are hungry and 3.1 billion undernourished. Yet, current food output can feed everyone on the planet and one-third of output is lost between production and consumption.

To illustrate the challenges and possible solutions, he produced a Rubik's cube. Its symmetry can be broken in just a few moves, but "to put it back takes you a lot of time, effort and a systemic approach". The cube symbolises the sustainable development goals of resilient, inclusive and sustainable agri-food systems through "better production, better nutrition, a better environment and a better life".

Farmers are forward looking, but they require finance in the present when faced with a three to five-year conversion period. Incentives such as research, digital solutions and AI could help convince them make the journey "which will bring cash into their pockets much quicker".



“ We produce enough food to feed everyone on this planet. But trade wars and tariffs are blocking the flow, and one third of food gets wasted. ”

Viorel Gutu



“ Farmers all over the world aren't strongly represented in parliaments. So it is hard to connect their needs to policy. ”

Luís Rua

Luís Rua, Secretary of Trade and International Relations, Ministry of Agriculture, Brazil, emphasised that the country "has a great relationship with all countries in the world when you talk about food". It is a founder member of the Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty and is working with African countries to help them improve agricultural practices. Brazil does not try to impose any model or regulation. "This is the approach we have when we talk about cooperation to improve food systems."

Domestically, the country has reduced deforestation by 45% in the Amazon, is enhancing law enforcement and implementing programmes to make its agriculture even more sustainable. Effort is going to converting degraded pastures. Worldwide, these account for 30% of land. Brazil aims to transform over 40 million hectares of low productivity land into agricultural areas within ten years.

The speaker called for Europe and other geographies to join Brazil in promoting "the geopolitics of peace". In a world of conflict, "we must be a reliable source of food security, energy security and climate security".





Starting session 2, Felipe Ortega Schlingmann, Head of Bioeconomy Division, Projects Directorate, European Investment Bank (EIB), described the EU bank's role. "We are a promotional bank that provides loan finance to viable investments that align with EU policies and EU integration." It has sizable investments in agriculture and Green Deal policies.

The EIB offers loans complementing public finance to tackle persistent investment gaps for activities able to fully or partially sustain themselves. Grants can also be used for activities unable to repay loans, but in a way that leverages private financing. In the agricultural sector, a one euro guarantee can mobilise a further five. Farmers need a market if they are to invest in sustainability. "This can come from conscious consumers able to pay more" or from policymakers using taxation and regulation. "We are in this business and we have quite some experience already."

“We are in this business and we have quite some experience already.”

Felipe Ortega Schlingmann

Jean-Marc Peterschmitt, Managing Director, Corporate Sector and Chief Operating Officer, Client Services Group, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), explained the bank focuses on the private sector, providing €2 billion a year.

Food and agribusiness are a core area. It supports change towards more sustainability. "I think the direction is radical, but the steps are incremental," he stressed. This transition must be accompanied by financial and economic sustainability. "That is what is going to make the private sector want to take on that change." The EBRD and the EIB can play a key role through their unique ability to bring together finance and mobilise "the right mix of incentive, risk-sharing instruments to package that with technical assistance". The challenge is to "bring scale in our joint ability to finance that transition".



“I think the direction is radical, but the steps are incremental.”

Jean-Marc Peterschmitt

Morgan Després, Executive Director International Finance, Economy & Nature Programmes, ECF, emphasised the importance of the right financial incentives. These must reward behaviour aligned with desired outcomes and recognise the risks for farmers. He suggested the latter is currently lacking.

With the CAP budget under pressure, he mused on the levers public finance could use to support the private sector in driving change. "It interesting to see what others have done elsewhere," he said, citing the UK, which having left the CAP, is designing its own incentives. Financial innovation is essential as is the need for scale. This requires development of asset classes, standardisation of financial instruments and new tools, possibly around securitisation. "There is clearly some policy space for things to happen". A carbon tax and biodiversity credits could be options worth exploring.



“ There is clearly some policy space for things to happen. ”

Morgan Després



“ Without changing food policy we won't see the change we want to see in the agri-food system. ”

Jörg-Andreas Krüger

Jurgen Tack, Secretary General, European Landowners' Organization, presented illustrative purchases of milk and wheat from six farms – half between 9 to 40 hectares and half 1,000 to 2,000 hectares. Two practised conventional farming, two organic and two regenerative. The two conventional farms had the highest profit margin. The others were much lower because economic and weather conditions made it difficult "to have a steady income on a year-by-year basis". He drew two conclusions. Farmers seeking a profit should follow the conventional route. More importantly, CAP reform should "not be about those who need it the most, but about those who deserve it the most" and "are making a real difference". Soil health could be used as an indicator of that contribution.

Jurgen insisted the debate was not about small or big farms, but "absolutely about those who want to implement sustainability". The current subsidy system fails to take that sufficiently into account.



“ The CAP investment should not go to the farmers that need it the most but to those that deserve it the most. ”

Jurgen Tack

Inspirational Talk – Putting climate and nature on the balance sheet



“ Let’s put nature on the balance sheet. Financing the transition towards more sustainable land use is an interesting investment opportunity. ”

Tobias Bandel

Setting the scene for the afternoon sessions, Tobias Bandel, Co-founder, The Landbanking Group and Cherry Muijsson, Chief Investment Officer, Multi-Asset Strategies and Solutions, BlackRock, described how to de-risk investment and put natural capital at the forefront.

During the second inspirational talk of the day, Mr Bandel pointed to the change in business cases now that nature no longer provides the reliable and free services it once did. His group has developed a natural capital management platform that measures, manages and monetises these investments into assets which are identifiable, controllable and generate future economic value.

As investors, BlackRock looks at nature from the twin perspectives of quantifying risk and identifying investment opportunities. Ms Muijsson estimated the market for nature-positive business models to be around \$10 trillion, half of which is linked to sustainable food, agriculture and land use. As an investor, BlackRock assesses companies according to their resource efficiency, circular business models, nature restoration and wider natural use.

Summing up, Mr Bandel said: “Let’s put nature on the balance sheet. Financing the transition towards more sustainable land use is an interesting investment opportunity.”

On behalf of The Landbanking Group, Tobias Bandel signed an agreement at this year’s Annual Conference to join the Forum as a supporting partner.

Session 3: Implementing the transition – what will make the difference



Harald Grethe, Director, Agora Agrar and Professor Head of Agricultural Development and Trade Group, Humboldt-University of Berlin, began the panel discussion by pointing to the imperative of reconciling competitiveness and sustainability. Public money should be used to create markets private capital ignores. “Not wheat or beef, but things like biodiversity or carbon sequestration.” He championed a strong CAP budget, not on grounds of farmers’ “neediness” or income support, but as a reward for providing what society wants. To measure those goods, satellite imagery could be used to identify factors such as carbon content.

“What we need to do is remunerate the provision of farmers delivering.”

Prof. Dr. Harald Grethe

Professor Grethe urged policymakers to promote sustainable consumption and to develop additional funding opportunities, notably the inclusion of agriculture in the emissions trading scheme to reward good practice. The agricultural community should be less hesitant and become more involved in climate discussions on greenhouse gas pricing.

Katie McRobert, CEO, Australian Farm Institute, emphasised the importance of establishing common ground. This encompasses “the shared values that people working with agriculture hold with other people in society”. In a post-truth world of mistrust and polarisation, she warned: “Until we articulate and identify those shared values, we will be stuck”.

Her organisation has produced an Australian Agricultural Sustainability Framework with principles enshrining shared environmental, social and financial values for agriculture. The exercise was far from easy. But the result is “a set of shared principles, at least for Australia, which we think are transferable to other people as well as other systems”. Time may be short, but the abundance of intellectual capital and goodwill available should be leveraged to define shared values and apply Mike Massimino’s advice of focussing on the mission.



“Policy should be built on common grounds and shared values need to be identified.”

Katie McRobert

Grzegorz Brodziak, Farmer & CEO Goodvalley, Poland and President of the Management Board, Polska Federacja Rolna, identified a level playing field, regulations which do not restrict, but help to establish and run, a sustainable business profitably as key factors for a successful transition. He spoke from the experience of turning old state-run Polish operations into 25 thriving pig farms with a sustainable green value chain.

The company has considerably reduced the CO₂ footprint of its final product, pork. Goodvalley calculates its own carbon footprint and life cycle assessments to demonstrate its green credentials to consumers. He emphasised the need "to re-educate consumers and the general public about what agriculture is about". Livestock is an essential part of agriculture. "The poop is part of the loop and without livestock production, we cannot have sustainable models."



“ There is a need to re-educate consumers and the general public about what agriculture is about. ”

Grzegorz Brodziak



“ We need to focus on sustainable productivity. It's the only way to avoid the mistakes of the past and reduce our environmental footprint. ”

Tassos Haniotis

Tassos Haniotis, Special Advisor for Sustainable Productivity, Forum for the Future of Agriculture and Senior Guest Research Scholar, IIASA, described the big picture as focussing on sustainable productivity "because we need to avoid the mistakes of the past where we increased the overall level of production at the cost of the environment". The new policy design must combine economic and environmental factors into "a single sustainable productivity payment" conditional on performance.

He welcomed recognition in the European Commission's recent Vision for Agriculture and Food that primary agriculture is a strategic sector contributing to society. However, this fails to set clear priorities. Solid analysis and impact assessments are essential. There must be "clear options that you are able to quantify the impacts". When reforms are introduced, it is not their initial speed that is crucial, but that their path is irreversible.



Session 4 – Innovation for a profitable, climate smart & nature positive agri-food system



“Today, with cameras and computer vision, farmers are going through the field identifying weeds. They only spray where the weeds are, saving from 50% up to 77% of the herbicides being used.”

Deanna Kovar

Deanna Kovar, President, Worldwide Agriculture & Turf Division, John Deere, opened the fourth session by describing her company's focus as “making our farmers the most profitable, the most productive and the most sustainable farmers on the planet”. She gave two examples of how technology helps profitability and sustainability go hand in hand.

The company has developed ‘See and Spray’ technology. Equipped with cameras, computer vision and machine learning, a spraying machine can target weeds, rather than all the plants, as in the past, in a field of corn, soybean or cotton, reducing herbicide use by 60% last year. The three-year old technology has already been rolled out in the US and “it is our intention to take it all round the world in every job step and in every crop possible”.

The data created is stored in the John Deere Operations Center, an online management system providing access to free information anytime, anywhere. The Center collects, analyses and shares data farmers around the world have submitted. It is connected to software companies, industry participants and the entire ag ecosystem. “It is truly becoming the operating system for the farm,” she explained, supplying farmers with insights and advice to help their decision making. Looking to the future, she said: “Computer vision and machine learning are just beginning to be a huge opportunity for us.”

Roman Tarnovsky, Vice President, Global Head of Carbon and Strategic Partnership, Indigo Ag, said his company's role is "to bring sustainable agriculture to scale", helping farmers to make, sustain and generate revenue from the changes they make. Innovation agriculture must combine highly localised solutions applicable to a particular plot of land, while having the capacity to be scaled up. Financial incentives are crucial to ease the transition. The company helps farmers access new revenue streams. Those in its carbon programme earn 75% of the prices paid for carbon credits and have already received "tens of millions of dollars". The payments are not just a transition incentive. Farmers are looking for predictable and sustainable incomes and "deserve to continue monetising what they do on an ongoing basis".

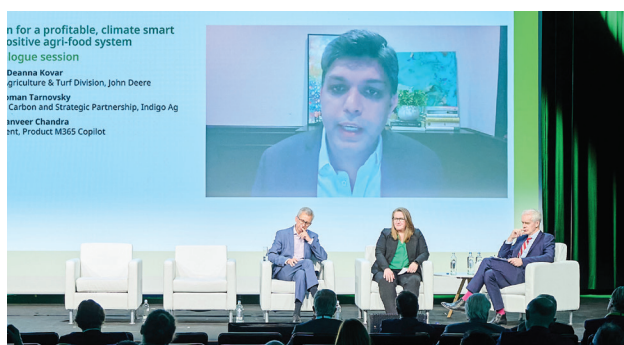
That longer-term perspective requires a critical mass of farmers to scale up the innovation programme. As more farmers become involved, their data is analysed by the company's software, data management and science technology covering millions of hectares. "Farmers benefit from the fact that quantifying at big scale generates much less statistical uncertainty, so there are embedded benefits."

The third ingredient is trust: farmers must have faith in the company's science and use of their agricultural data. Indigo Ag submits its science to external peer reviews and reassures farmers it uses their data responsibly. That data provides them and agronomists with insights to improve their practices. "I think it creates that virtuous circle that we need to continue encouraging."



“Farmers are looking for predictable and sustainable incomes and deserve to continue monetising what they do on an ongoing basis.”

Roman Tarnovsky



“We want any farmer in the world to be able to access these technologies.”

Ranveer Chandra

Ranveer Chandra, General Manager in M365 Copilot and Chief Technology Officer of Agri-Food, Microsoft, began working in the company on data-driven agriculture in 2014. At the time, many farmers, despite their experience, often made agricultural decisions on guesswork. The project examined whether it was possible to "use data-driven agriculture to augment a farmer's knowledge with data and AI". The research, in collaboration with others, initially created a platform containing all of a farm's data. "This is important for artificial intelligence. You have to run these algorithms. You need the data in one place," he explained.

The second stage led to creation of multi-modal artificial intelligence to convert data into insights to help farmers in their decisions. The latest addition is a generative AI capability with co-pilots to see how this could transform the lives of all players in the system from farmers and food processors to equipment companies and bankers and give farmers and agronomists a powerful second opinion.

These developments are being used to remove guesswork and democratise the entire agri-food system. "We want any farmer in the world to be able to access these technologies." Microsoft is developing the concept of a co-pilot. "It is about helping the farmer see this as their assistant," he explained, particularly as agriculture has been reluctant to adopt technology. It is designed to help create trust in the AI generated information that "can tell you the pros and cons of what it means to take certain actions".

Session 5 – The future vision for agriculture in Europe



“We must go back to the roots and reconnect food with territory, seasonality and traditions.”

Christophe Hansen

The final session began with a video from Agriculture Commissioner Christophe Hansen. He explained that the Vision for Agriculture and Food the Commission unveiled on 19 February sets a course to tackle the challenges farmers face of low income, bureaucracy, extreme climate events and geopolitical uncertainties. “We must go back to the roots and reconnect food with territory, seasonality and traditions,” he said. The path ahead will not be easy. Farmers, the food supply chain, civil society, member states, the European Parliament and consumers will all need to be involved. “Together, we can shape an attractive farming and food sector for generations to come.”

Bogusław Wijatyk, Director General of Poland’s Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, gave an overview by video of his government’s key priorities during its current rotating EU presidency. Warsaw fully supports the vision’s aims, particularly “the emphasis on making the agri-food sector more competitive, resilient and attractive to future generations of farmers”.

He identified the inputs required: an ambitious, ring-fenced CAP budget, simplification of rules to free farmers to concentrate on production, application of science, innovation and good practice, and active farmer involvement. In a changing world and geopolitical conditions, “dialogue is key to the success of any vision”.



“Dialogue is key to the success of any vision.”

Bogusław Wijatyk



In response to the video interventions, Petra Laux, Chief Sustainability Officer and Head Sustainability and Corporate Affairs, Syngenta, highlighted that: “this time the farmer is really at the center of the vision for the future of agriculture.” She stressed that we’ve reached a pivotal moment for European farming, and she explained that we need to chart a path forward that balances sustainability with competitiveness.

What is lacking is a “toolbox for farmers” to help them meet the three objectives. The Commission now needs to present concrete proposals. She highlighted three critical areas to empower farmers in this transformation: biocontrols, seed technology and digital agriculture.

“ This time the farmer is really at the center of the vision for the future of agriculture. ”

Petra Laux

Alberto Arroyo Schnell, Head of Programme and Policy, European Regional Office of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), began by thanking farmers for the healthy food they provide and his environmental colleagues “for keeping the environmental bar high”. He stressed: “There is no such thing as sustainable farming, if we don’t have an environment that supports that farm.”

While there is much in the vision to commend it to environmentalists – circularity, soil and water resilience – he highlighted the importance of nature-based solutions. This has enormous potential for the future. He highlighted how nature conservation and agriculture have the same goal, the preservation of our ecosystems’ services and natural assets for food production.



“ There is no such thing as sustainable farming, if we don’t have an environment that supports that farm. ”

Alberto Arroyo Schnell



Noor Yafai, Europe Director, Global Policy and Institutional Partnerships, The Nature Conservancy, emphasised the need to find common ground to implement the vision. Her organisation, the ForumforAg and others jointly contributed to its contents. One of the strong messages from the different stakeholders was the “the need to link food and water security to biodiversity and climate security”.

The Vision contains a set of signals and signposts. It now requires a detailed roadmap to meet the goals. This should contain, for the first time, a policy “for regenerative forms of agriculture and food production” to support Europe’s strategic autonomy and climate resilience. Nature credits require an EU-wide framework based on credible common science and governance allowing for national flexibility. Speed is of the essence. “The vision is great, but every day that goes by, the costs of inaction will rise.”



“ The vision is great, but every day that goes by, the costs of inaction will rise. ”

Noor Yafai



“ By pooling human and political resources together, we can achieve a lot. ”

Bart Vandewaetere

Bart Vandewaetere, Vice-President ESG Engagement, Nestlé Europe, responded to the vision’s contents with three questions. Where is the money? How can his company work with farmers on regenerative agriculture? Where is the consumer and food? “Food is missing a bit in this vision and in implementation we need to bring it back.”

Translating the vision into practice should draw on the existing expertise food companies and farmers have gained in the Sustainable Agriculture Initiative. “We know exactly how to do it, how to measure progress and how to measure outcomes.” While outcomes should be rewarded, so too should onboarding. “If we don’t bring them on board, how will we ever think that there will be outcomes?” The transition should be seen as a landscape which everyone helps to shape.



Diving for answers to agri-food transformation

Fred Buyle

underwater explorer and
photographer

Forum for
the Future
of Agriculture
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Tuesday, April 1, 2025

“All world problems can only be tackled with a systemic approach and that is what we need.”

Fred Buyle

To open the final session, Rose O'Donovan read out a message from Jessica Roswell, Commissioner for Environment, Water Resilience and a Competitive Circular Economy. The Commissioner sent the forum a message confirming she would soon table a European water resilience strategy. This provided the introduction to the final inspirational talk of the day where Fred Buyle, Freediving World Record Holder, explorer and photographer, shared insights from his underwater experiences.

After winning four world records, he turned to photography “to show the underwater world in the most natural way”. His pictures demonstrated how humans and ocean wildlife, even large sharks, could happily coexist and interact. He became a marine biologist, helping scientists to tag and monitor different species. Their work confirms that below the surface 90% of predatory fish and sharks have been lost over the past 50 years. Agricultural practices, such as fertiliser use, eventually impact on oceans with unforeseen consequences. To tackle the problems facing the land, sea and global population requires a systemic approach. “We cannot just act on little things. That's what 45 years in the ocean showed me and the last 25 years working with scientists.”

Presentation of the Land and Soil Management Award



For the first time, the Land and Soil Management Award was presented on stage during the Annual Conference of the Forum for the Future of Agriculture, following a day when several presenters had already stressed the importance of soil in achieving sustainable agriculture.

Since its creation in 2008, the Land and Soil Management Award has recognised innovative and impactful practices that protect and restore soils while promoting sustainable land use. The award highlights exemplary efforts that address soil threats such as erosion, degradation, compaction, loss of biodiversity, and contamination, and fosters the broader implementation of resilient and scalable solutions across Europe.

The German project Gut & Bösel was awarded the 2024-2025 Land and Soil Management Award during the Forum's closing session, in recognition of the project's transformative approach to regenerative land and forestry management on over 3,000 hectares in Brandenburg.

Martin Gerzabek, President of the Jury, Land and Soil Management Award, commended the high quality of this year's entrants with 23 applications from 11 countries. He presented the award to Benedict Bösel. Explaining the jury's choice, he said the project had demonstrated economic feasibility, cooperation with a non-profit research company, a scientific approach and substantial outreach. "I found it one of the best applications I have ever seen."

“This year's winner was one of the best applications I have ever seen.”

Martin Gerzabek



Mr Bösel accepted the award “not just on behalf of myself, but on behalf of the soil”. He emphasised: “We are not owners of the land. We are its guests, its students, and hopefully its regenerators.”

The project had shown that agriculture did not just provide food, but could heal ecosystems, build resilience and reconnect people. The benefits can be seen “in a living soil that stores water and carbon, in trees that bring shade and income, in farmers that become stewards, innovators and storytellers”. His was not a romantic story, but one of “economics, policy, science and courage”. He called for a rethink of values where regeneration, not depletion, is rewarded. This requires alliances involving boardrooms, parliaments and classrooms to “turn agriculture into one of the most powerful climate and peace solutions of our time”. The question is not can we afford to change, but can we afford not to?

“We are not owners of the land. We are its guests, its students, and hopefully its regenerators.”

Benedict Bösel

Given the high standard of entries, the jury awarded two diplomas of recognition. One went to Joseph’s Dream in Portugal. This has transformed agriculture “into a force for environmental restoration, rural revival and sustainable economic growth”. Jacques Naudé launched the project which has turned hundreds of hectares of abandoned land into organic almond and walnut orchards, created jobs and “demonstrated that the circular economy approach is both profitable and scalable”.



The other was The San Giorgio Soil Regeneration Project in Sicily led by Rudolf Freiherr von Freyberg-Eisenberg. It uses innovative water management strategies and reforestation to create a resilient ecosystem able to absorb water during floods and decrease desertification. Socially, the project successfully integrates traditional knowledge with modern science. “The property serves as both a testing ground and a model for adaptive agricultural practices.”

The Land and Soil Management Award is supported by the European Landowners’ Organization, the European Commission, the Joint Research Centre, Syngenta, University of Ljubljana, University of KU Leuven and University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna.



Closing remarks

“Apparently, we humans are the most intelligent species on planet Earth, so it would be high time to prove it.”

Janez Potočnik



In his closing remarks, Janez Potočnik drew two main messages from inspirational speakers Mike Massimino and Fred Buyle. Whether looking down at Earth from space or up from the ocean depths, one sees “pure beauty”. Both perspectives confirm the “ultimate fragility in which we live”. He stressed: “we should behave accordingly and respect that.”

The Chair of the Forum shared some hard facts about climate change. Indicators continue to advance in the wrong direction. He informed participants of the work of the Systems Transformation Hub. This aims “to bring systems thinking and acting to European policy making”. It is recommending a coherent European land use strategy that would replace sectoral conflicts with one “grounded in systemic thinking and aligned with long-term resilience goals”.

He concluded: “Apparently, we humans are the most intelligent species on planet Earth, so it would be high time to prove it.”



All the summaries in this document and videos of all sessions are available on www.forumforag.com

About the Forum for the Future of Agriculture

The Forum for the Future of Agriculture (ForumforAg) is one of the leading international forums committed to help building a more resilient, sustainable, climate-smart and nature-positive food and agriculture system.

The Founding Partners came together in 2008 to create a new, open and inclusive place in Europe where all stakeholders interested in contributing to a more sustainable agriculture system could come together to debate and share knowledge and expertise on how this could be achieved.

The Forum's Annual Conference, which takes place in Brussels every spring, has established itself as one of the premier meeting places in Europe and globally for stakeholders meeting in open dialogue on the future of the food and agriculture system.

The Forum's Secretariat, under the guidance of the Forum Chairman and the Advisory Council, work with our founding, strategic and supporting partners to achieve the mission of the Forum to contribute to the development of a more sustainable food and agriculture system.

Our partners support the mission of the Forum to contribute to the development of a more sustainable food and agriculture system. The Founding and Strategic Partners also act as a sounding board and provide counsel on our thought leadership activities and positions, such as the Call to Action. The Partners also exchange knowledge and expertise on what works on the ground, as well as constructively challenging each other, as well as other stakeholders in their community, to help create a more sustainable food system.

Find out more at www.forumforag.com

Founding partners



Strategic partners



Supporting partners



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