



COLLABORATION PLATFORM ON AGRICULTURE

Exchange on Advancing Young and Historically Underserved Farmers and Addressing Intergenerational Farm Issues

On Monday 3 June May 2023, United States and European Union Young Farmer representatives, joined by the European Commission's Directorate General for Agriculture (DG AGRI) and United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) officials exchanged on experiences and issues of possible common interest.

The EU and U.S. are grappling with the ramifications of aging farmer populations as they both undertake ambitious efforts to make their agricultural systems more resilient, sustainable, and inclusive. At present, only a small portion of farm managers are young, and they face significant hurdles in establishing and/or expanding their operations. These challenges include gaining access to land, farm equipment, and financing.

The session explored ongoing efforts across the Atlantic to support young and historically underserved farmers. It addressed the issues rural communities and families encounter with the intergenerational transfer of land, knowledge, and other resources. Participants exchanged perspectives and reviewed efforts being taken to address this complex challenge.

DG AGRI confirmed that generational renewal has been for decades and continues to be a key EU policy concern and more progress is necessary. The EU and US have engaged on Rural Development issues in other fora such as the OECD. DG AGRI welcomed the participation of young farmers in the dialogue. It is they who will face the considerable challenges of the future. USDA was pleased the issue of Young and Historically Underserved Farmers was being addressed in the CPA. Young farmers are our future.

In a presentation, DG AGRI recalled that rural areas cover 80% of the EU area and 30% of the population. Several rural regions suffer from a population decline. The average age of a European Farmer is 57 years. Only one in ten of Young Farmers are less than 40 years old (EU definition of Young Farmer). For female farmers, only 1 out of 20 are under forty years though this is improving. Farms run by young farmers tend to be bigger and more productive. Of the Common Agricultural Policy's (CAP) 9 specific objectives, one is generational renewal. An amount equal to at least 3% of the CAP's direct payments budget should go for supporting young farmers. Close to 400 000 young farmers are expected to start farming in the period 2023/27 according to Member States estimates.

The European Council of Young Farmers (CEJA) representatives explained that CEJA is an umbrella structure for national organisations. CEJA familiarises national organisations with EU issues and helps build capacity to give individual organisations a voice at the EU level.

CEJA' key concern is generational renewal and presenting issues from the young farmer perspective. Fewer and fewer young farmers want to join the sector. Key policy areas for CEJA are access to land and access to investment and credit. For credit, here is evidence of age discrimination. CEJA also functions to monitor policy developments and build capacity for young farmer organisations to respond the European level issues.

A representative of the Young Farmers & Ranchers Committee of the American Farm Bureau (YF&R) described the work of the Committee being one of three main engagement programs in the American Farm Bureau (young farmers and ranchers, women's leadership and promotion and education). The Committee provides networking and capacity building opportunities such as training. YF&R is committed to help farmers with their succession. Current policy issues that can help young farmers are diversifying production and developing niche markets; developing sustainable farming; supporting the use of technology; seeking government support. Another focus is to break down the stigma on mental health. Suicide rates among farmers is 3.5 times higher than across average population. The Farm Bureau provides material to inform on farm succession.

The USDA representative mentioned the importance of underserved and young producers in responding to climate challenges. Minority voices and historically underserved groups, female or young voices need to be heard at the time of policy discussions and resource allocation. Addressing climate and equity fit well together. In the U.S. 8% of farmers obtain 85% of USDA resources. It is not only about affordability of food, but also about how sustainably food is produced and leaving the land in a better state than found. Talented students should be supported to have successful careers in agriculture. Young producers tend to be more technological savvy and question more the status quo.

In the ensuing discussion, AGRI mentioned an EU policy concern that some actors could be left behind by rapid technological progress. CEJA confirmed the importance of mental health issues and that access to money and land are the main hurdles to establish as a young farmer. The USDA representative agreed that access to land is very difficult unless it is inherited. It was suggested help is needed for farmers willing to hand over their farm to other generations. YF&R referred to some programs that help with succession. In the U.S. some banks offer special loans to new entrants, and arrangements to share equipment. The possibility of tax incentives for those willing to hand over their farms to a younger generation is worthy of consideration.

In the EU, farm size leads to farmers seeking jobs off farm. Several issues can play a role, for example in the US, an important incentive can be the off-farm job providing health insurance. CEJA mentioned that in some European countries traditionally over half the farms have some outside employment.

In conclusion USDA welcomed this direct contact and the open discussion. The two sides should capitalize on the opportunity to continue examining these issues.

USDA believed the changes necessary to adapt to climate challenges is a good opportunity to capitalise, we ought to look at it together.

It was noted the structure, agenda and mission of the Young Farmer groups represented were similar and the topics covered are high on the political agenda of both parties. Inheritance and the market situation play key roles in deterring young farmers. In the EU the legal system is often quite different between Member States and often different national solutions are needed. In this difficult environment, a successful transition between the generations and to a better educated workforce is very challenging but essential. Both sides concluded that exchanging on good practices is worthwhile and should continue.

Speakers

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Jeremy Adamson Policy, Advisor for Trade and Foreign Agricultural Affairs USDA

Maria Gafo, Deputy Head of Unit DG AGRI

Dr. Dewayne Goldmon, USDA Senior Advisor for Racial Justice and Equity

Peter Meedendorp President, Marion Picot, Secretary General, European Council of Young Farmers

Heather K Graham, Vice Chair, Young Farmers & Ranchers Committee, American Farm Bureau