



# ***FARMING'S GOT TALENT!***

***VOCATIONAL EDUCATION  
AND TRAINING FOR  
AGRICULTURE IN TRANSITION***

## ***EVENT REPORT***

***Brussels, 24 November 2022***



## Context and objectives of the event

*We cannot underestimate the amount of **talent** that farming requires today.* These were the opening words of Wolfgang Burtscher, European Commission's Director for agriculture and rural development in his address at the event "**Farming got talent!**", held the 24 November 2022 in Brussels.

In a rapidly changing world, European farmers face multiple challenges and often need to juggle conflicting priorities. Their capacity to assess, react and adjust is key for their business to remain resilient and competitive in the face of short- and long-term challenges.

Under the headline ambitions of the **EU Green Deal** and the **Digital age**, the whole European economy is undergoing unprecedented transformation.

For this twin transition to be inclusive and ensure fair outcomes for all, it is paramount for all people to develop and acquire the **skills** needed to thrive in such rapidly changing economy. This also holds true for the agricultural sector.

Indeed, the twin transition will have significant implications for agricultural skills, education, and employment opportunities. At the same time, skills, education, and professional training are important enablers for the transition. In this respect agricultural **vocational education and training** (VET) are key to help farmers develop the right mind-set and competences to respond to the needs of the transition.

*Does the EU farming sector have what it takes in terms of skillset, education, and training levels to catch the opportunities offered by this transformation? How can agricultural education and training make farming attractive and ready for the twin green and digital transition? What skills are most needed in farming today and how we can foster them?*

These are among the key questions that the event set out to reply to. Teachers, students, training providers, EU and national organisations and policy makers came together to discuss the role VET can play in creating a farming sector that is ready for the green and digital transition.

The **overall aim** of the event was to highlight the role of vocational education and training and identify challenges and successful approaches for the development of the right skills to enable the transition to a sustainable and resilient EU farming sector.

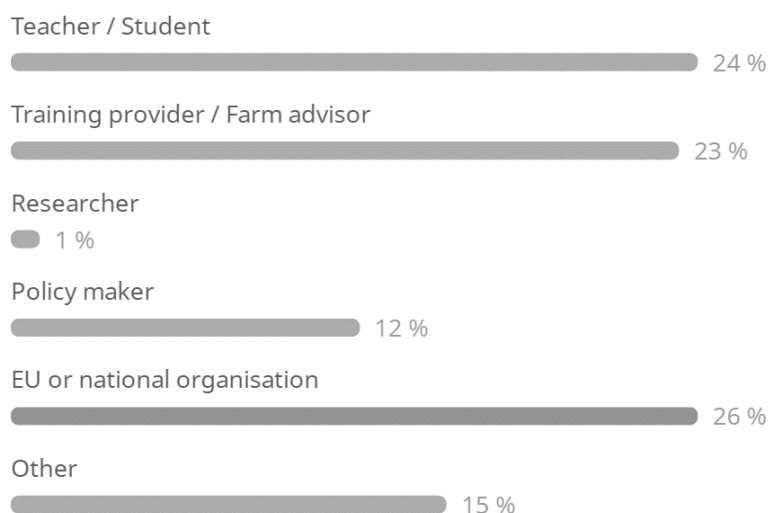
More specifically, the event aimed to:

1. Identify the changes in skills needed in the EU farming sector to address the challenges brought forward by the twin green and digital transition
2. Share successful experiences of vocational education and training for sustainable and resilient farming in the EU and identify challenges faced
3. Explore available tools to support high quality VET programmes and promote synergies

## Attendance

Around **100 participants** attended the event in Brussels, while over **1 200 online viewers** followed the event's web streaming<sup>1</sup> from across Europe. Teachers and students of agricultural vocational schools, trainers, farm advisors and EU and national organisations were the most represented categories of participants.

### *The event's audience*



*Source: Sli.do poll at the event*

## Scene setting

When addressing the issue of skills in agriculture and the agri-food sector there are relatively few data that come to help. Eurostat tell us that – in 2016 – **only one out of 7 farm managers had a full agricultural training**, leaving most farmers with practical experience only. The situation improves when one considers the younger cohort of farm managers. There is also a certain variability alone EU Member States. However, the picture is far from comprehensive.

To help fill the gaps and set the scene, two keynote presentations from the **OECD** (Organisation for economic cooperation and development) and **CEDEFOP** (European Centre for the development of vocational training) provided the audience with relevant insights on the skill shortages<sup>2</sup> and skills trend for the agri-food sector<sup>3</sup>, building on findings of recent research. The following are some take-away's messages:

<sup>1</sup> Available on the event webpage at: [https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/events/farmings-got-talent-vocational-education-and-training-agriculture-transition-2022-11-24\\_en](https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/events/farmings-got-talent-vocational-education-and-training-agriculture-transition-2022-11-24_en) (for a limited time period)

<sup>2</sup> See the [OECD report on the Labour and skills shortages in the agro-food sector](#), January 2023

<sup>3</sup> See CEDEFOP policy brief (2023) [Growing green- How vocational education and training can drive the green transition in agri-food](#)

- The EU agri-food sector workforce is generally **low-skilled** with 68% of farm managers counting on practical experience only, but 22% of younger managers have full agricultural training<sup>4</sup> (only 9% in total).
- Over 40% of the EU agricultural workforce is under- or over-qualified, denoting a **qualification mismatch** that is among the highest in comparison with other economic sectors.
- **Lifelong learning is not an attractive option** for the adult agri-food workforce with overall low level of participation in vocational education and training.
- The structural change of EU farms coupled with the priorities brought forward by the twin green and digital transition change the demand and typology of skills needed, with digital literacy, environmental management, and entrepreneurship at the forefront. This asks for an **adjustment** of education systems, training requirements and informal learning opportunities in order to fill the gaps.
- A range of **barriers** to learning (including costs, time, accessibility, inclusiveness, infrastructures) needs to be taken into account in formulating the right policy mix to make **agriculture-related VET more attractive and more responsive** to the sector's short-term and long-term needs.

The key findings from the two presentations resonated with the audience's perception in terms of skills that will be needed by farmers in the long-term, with **digital skills** prominently in the focus.

*What are the skills that farmers will need most by 2040?*



*Source: Sli.do poll at the event*

## Vocational schools preparing the next generation of high-skilled agricultural professionals

A first round of presentations from 5 agricultural **vocational schools** led into the second session of the event where the focus was on vocational schools preparing the next generation of high-skilled agricultural professionals.

<sup>4</sup> Any training course continuing for the equivalent of at least two years full time training after the end of compulsory education and completed at an agricultural college, university, or other relevant institute of higher education.

The presentations provided a composite picture of teaching and learning approaches rooted in the diversity of EU agriculture and rural areas. Each of the presentations highlighted the role that vocational education – and vocational schools – can play as enabler of a smarter and more sustainable agricultural sector. Some commonalities emerged from the diverse set of experiences, which can be summarised as follows:

- Smart use of **EU funding opportunities** for cooperation and knowledge exchange such as ERASMUS+ to pull together learning resources and develop innovative curricula
- Close attention to developing relevant skills and maintaining high **motivation** for students and teachers alike
- High sensibility and reactivity of students and teachers to **sustainable farming** issues and the role of **innovation**
- A key role for practical, **work-based training** for effective skills development
- **Collaboration and networking** among schools (also across borders), research and businesses to make curricula relevant to the sectors' needs and attractive to students, and to facilitate the entry into the labour market.

*An overview of the presentations by the 5 agricultural vocational schools*

<b>Country</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>Challenge / Goal</b>	<b>Approach/Solution</b>
<b>Italy</b>	<a href="#">Agricultural Technical Institute Basile Caramia</a>	Technological innovation and environmental sustainability: tackling climate change, protecting biodiversity (e.g. via genetic conservation, green fertilisers)	Agriculture 4.0 Experimental learning facilities Collaboration school-research-businesses
<b>Belgium</b>	<a href="#">Provincial Technical Institute, Kortrijk</a>	Developing curricula for aquaponics. Lack of teaching material. Teach the teachers. Attracting students.	Collaboration across borders (Interreg, Erasmus+) Theory & practice: theoretical courses and applied laboratory research
<b>Austria</b>	<a href="#">Agricultural College Krems</a>	Integrating and working with Sustainable Development Goals. Water management in viticulture and wine processing, climate change.	Erasmus+ (gamification)

<b>Hungary</b>	<a href="#">Janoshalma Agricultural College</a>	Making teaching and learning attractive and relevant to students' expectations. Overcome resource limitations (remote learning, availability of equipment).	Training through virtual reality Networking among schools and with local companies
<b>Romania</b>	<a href="#">College for Agriculture and Food Industry Tara Bârsei</a>	Developing an entrepreneurial mindset, business development (e.g. rural tourism). Integrated learning activities "from farm to fork"	Integrated practical workshops: work-based learning Agricultural education and training as local development strategy

For more details see presentations on the [event website](#)

*"When looking at how to train young people, so that they can see agriculture in a positive way, we have to tell them that a farmer is not only someone who produces food but a guardian of our territory."*

Francesco Sanolla, agricultural student, Italy

## Vocational education and training for the twin transition: challenges and ways forward

The enthusiasm and the commitment of teachers and students behind such experiences was highly inspiring for the following panel discussion around the challenges and ways forward of agricultural VET. The experts' views were triggered by these overarching questions: *Are education and vocational training ready to provide farm entrepreneurs and workers with the right competences and skills? What changes are needed? How can agricultural VET contribute to make the farming sector more attractive and deliver on the long-term sustainability objectives?*

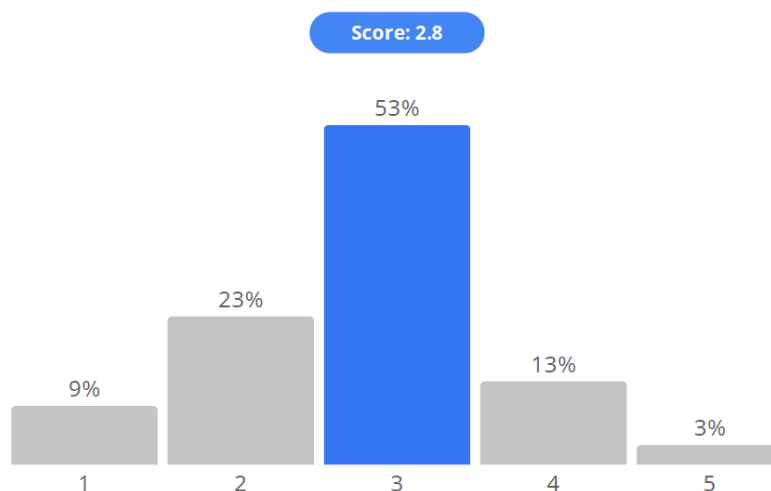
Here some insights from the discussion:

- Modern agricultural education and training can help **change people's perception** of farming and support the transition of the sector to meet the objective of the Green Deal. However, agricultural VET does not work in a vacuum. For farmers to build long-term sustainability and resilience in their operations while remaining competitive, they need a long-term **career perspective** (i.e. economic sustainability). Combining both views is key to raise the profile of farming as a **viable professional choice and way of life**.
- Agricultural students are also **future workers**: they need the prospect of fair working conditions and stable contracts. Also, they need knowledge on labour

contracts and to be overall better prepared to enter the job market. **Predictable working conditions** are key for the attractiveness and revitalisation of the sector. In this respect, **social partners should be consulted** in curricula development and engaged in training.

- **All levels of education and training** must work together, from basic to post-graduate and lifelong learning. It is not a question of producing more knowledge, but to use what is already available at its full extent. **Agricultural schools** have a key role to play here. They hold the responsibility of taking stock of relevant knowledge and translate it for students but also farmers (the “old students”) when they have an issue to solve.
- At the same time, for training curricula to be compelling and relevant for farmers and farm workers, they need to be **context- and needs-based**. Education and training curricula and programmes must be co-created with farmers.
- **Soft skills** covering e.g. marketing, communication or social media must not be underestimated. Students (and teachers) should be motivated to go abroad and compare practices. Relevant **funding streams** for training must be combined to create the right incentives for up-skilling and re-skilling.

*Is agricultural VET ready to respond to the challenges of the twin green and digital transition?*



Source: Sli.do poll (where “readiness” level was scored along a range from 1 to 5)

### **A skills partnership for the agri-food ecosystem**

Launched in 2022 the **skills partnership for the agri-food ecosystem** is one of 14 skills partnership that implement the [Pact for Skills](#) – a flagship initiative under the [European Skills agenda](#).

The goal of the partnership is to upskill and reskill people in the agri-food sector, the largest producing and manufacturing sector in Europe. This will

make the agri-food ecosystem more attractive to young people, while offering a lifelong learning perspective for both employers and employees.

The partnership brings together EU and national associations and federations, social partners, EU organisations, private companies, academics and training providers, NGOs who share the common ambitions of up-skilling and re-skilling Europe’s agri-food sector and the learning of the skills necessary for its green and digital transition.

The partnership aims to set a joint **strategy** to design and implement a sectoral education, training, upskilling and reskilling framework, set relevant **goals** and develop the means to **monitoring** their progress. It will develop a roadmap towards this ambition building on the work of key projects and initiatives such as the Erasmus+ projects [FIELDS](#) and [I-RESTART](#).

### Vocational training and lifelong learning to match sustainability challenges

The third session of the event put the focus on **vocational training**. A range of training providers highlighted diverse training opportunities for farmers and agri-entrepreneurs across the EU. The aim was to stimulate reflections about training needs and approaches while linking such experiences with sustainability challenges. Here below a summary overview of the presentations, with a focus on training objectives and approaches.

#### *Overview of the presentations*

<b>Country</b>	<b>Provider</b>	<b>Training for...</b>	<b>Focus on...</b>
<b>Belgium</b>	<a href="#">Groene Kring - young farmers organisation</a>	Management skills Financial insights Communication & image building	Experts and professionals (outside the farming sector) as teachers Relevance and practical use of knowledge, co-creation
<b>Spain</b>	<a href="#">LiveAdapt - LIFE project</a>	Extensive livestock systems Climate change: desertification, water management Animal welfare Resilient and adaptive management	Specific training aimed at students, professionals, and stakeholders (“systemic” approach) Innovation Learning through diversity (gender and age)



<b>Greece</b>	<a href="#">New Agriculture New Generation - non-profit organisation</a>	Workforce development Employment Entrepreneurship & innovation Regional development	Transformative approaches: peer-to-peer, “train the trainer” Business support (agri-food accelerator) Networking and collaboration Women
<b>Ireland</b>	<a href="#">TEAGASC - state agency</a>	Sustainable food systems Climate neutrality (2050)	Linking education-advice-research Farm visits Discussion groups 1-to-1 farmer engagement Digital platforms

For more details see presentations on the [event website](#)

The presentations outlined several issues worth consideration when developing and delivering effective training programmes in agriculture:

- **Peer-to peer** remains one of the most effective ways to engage farmers (of all ages) and deliver knowledge that is relevant for them. Whether these exchanges happen in the classroom or – even better – directly on the farm, the direct exchange of experience and insights among farmers elicit their knowledge and generate immediate response by peers who are more likely to apply the new insights in their own context.
- Looking beyond the “farm gate” to acquire relevant knowledge and skills is also very effective. **External expertise** from other sectors and professional domains, enrich the learning process and help generate “new solutions to old problems”. It is already useful when one expert provides a different view to a farming issue, but it best when such learning takes place in a **group of experts**. This becomes even more important considering the complexity of and inter-linkages of sustainability challenges (e.g. climate change, generational renewal, digitalisation,...) an the increasing number of competences required to address them.
- **Collaboration and partnerships** are key not only in delivering training courses, but also when developing them. When education professionals, advisors, researchers, and farmers collaborate, skilling needs are matched with up-to-date knowledge and capacity to deliver it.



In the **Netherlands**, the “**Green Table**” federates all green educational institutes (pre-vocational up to university) allowing them to work together under a framework of a 5-year programme, share knowledge and jointly participate in projects. They also work together with the business community, civil society organisations and the Dutch government under the “**Green Pact**” and join forces to deliver skills that help address main societal challenges and foster innovation.

- Connecting knowledge actors - especially research, education, and advice – among them and with the farmers allows for all the available knowledge to be used and made it available (in a comprehensible way) to those who will need to use it on the ground. At the same, this mechanism allows to elicit the **skills and knowledge needs** that are most important for farmers.

This system approach has been spearheaded under the **Common Agricultural Policy for 2023-2027** that asks EU Member States to take a more strategic approach towards the organisation and functioning of their knowledge and innovation system in agriculture (so-called AKIS). Key tools to ignite such connections are **EIP Operational Groups** projects<sup>5</sup>, which develop innovative solutions focused on farmers’ needs, bringing together people with complementary knowledge, co-creating all along the project lifetime. Agricultural schools can highly benefit from participating in such projects.

- Up-skilling and re-skilling strategies are more effective when they are tailored to the **local context and needs**. Schools are by nature strongly integrated with their territory and local community. This is a strength to build upon. In **France**, every agricultural school includes a farm or a professional workshop that provides huge benefits both for the students - who can obtain practical experience - but also for the local professionals for experimenting and development: farmers can come and learn new techniques and practices, including applying results from research. In **Catalonia**, the 14 national agricultural colleges spread throughout the region are physically close to farmers and therefore are considered a key tool to reach out to them to update knowledge.
- Vocational schools have the potential to become “**hubs**” for gathering and sharing knowledge by partnering with local actors (businesses, advisors etc.) and networking on a larger scale, eventually reaching out and connecting across borders.

When looking for inspirational models (and funding) for partners to work together, the concept of **ERASMUS+ Centres of Vocational Excellence**<sup>6</sup> (CoVE) comes handy also for the agricultural sector<sup>7</sup>. The idea of CoVEs is to bring together a broad range of actors (VET providers, employers,

<sup>5</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/eip/agriculture/en/about/operational-groups>

<sup>6</sup> <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/programme-guide/part-b/key-action-2/centres-vocational-excellence>

<sup>7</sup> See for example the project AgriNext - <https://www.agrinext-project.eu/>

research centres, employment services) to jointly develop **local “skills ecosystem”** addressing the needs of local labour markets, and at the same time work with **international** partners to learn from each other.

Finally, while discussing issues and strategies in attracting new talents in agriculture via vocational education and training, the audience was reminded of some important aspects:

- The key role of **work-based learning and apprenticeship**, also recognised at the political level by the Council of the EU<sup>8</sup> that set for the EU a target of 60% of VET learners to experience work-based learning by 2025. This becomes essential for the agricultural sector where learning through demonstration is one of the most effective ways to adopt new technologies and practices.
- The possible role played by **micro credentials**<sup>9</sup> in the agricultural sector in a context of rapid structural change, specialisation, and the increasing demand for skilled workers (while stressing the importance of having flexibility in training to accommodate farmers’ needs).
- Training is important, but the major obstacles is finding motivated young people interested to join the agricultural sector. For this we need an **integrated policy response** including via labour policies to attract talents from metropolitan areas to depopulated regions.

*“Where to focus efforts at the EU level? There are many best practices, but they cannot deliver alone if not embedded in a clear **skills strategy for agriculture**, which will allow to foster the collaboration and synergies needed.”*

Pierluigi Londero - Acting Director for Strategy and policy analysis, DG Agriculture and rural development, European Commission

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<sup>8</sup> Council Recommendation of 24 November 2020 on vocational education and training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience 2020/C 417/01 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32020H1202%2801%29>

<sup>9</sup> Council Recommendation of 16 June 2022 on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability 2022/C 243/02 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32022H0627%2802%29>

**Bringing the outcomes of the event further:  
the European Year of Skills**

**Aim:** Focus on existing skills shortages in the EU economy and give fresh impetus of up-skilling and re-skilling of the working age population

**4 objectives:**

- 1) Increase investments in training and upskilling
- 2) Strengthen skills relevance for the labour market by closely cooperating with all stakeholders
- 3) Better match people's aspirations with labour market needs
- 4) Attract third country nationals who have skills we are lacking in the EU

The European Year of Skills is relevant for all sectors – including farming – and encourages participation at all levels, from the European to the local.

**How to contribute?**

Visit the official website at [https://year-of-skills.europa.eu/index\\_en](https://year-of-skills.europa.eu/index_en)

Contact your country's National Coordinator

Organise events at national, regional and local levels related to skills policy

Make use of EU funding opportunities, tools and networks to support your actions and liaise with other interested people





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