Council of the European Union

Brussels, 19 June 2025
(OR. en)

10595/25

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NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
Subject:	AOB item for the meeting of the "Agriculture and Fisheries" Council on 23-24 June 2025: Outcome of the high-level conference on research, innovation and digitalisation to advance the competitiveness of European agriculture and ensure food security (Warsaw, 11-12 June 2025) - *Information from the Presidency*

On 11-12 June 2025, the high-level conference organised by the Polish Presidency of the Council of the European Union in cooperation with the European Commission, the Standing Committee on Agricultural Research (SCAR) and BIOEAST Initiative entitled **'Research, innovation and digitalisation to advance the competitiveness of European agriculture and ensure food security'** was held in Warsaw.

This event brought together over 200 participants and more than 50 panellists from all over the Europe, including ministers, parliamentarians, representatives of the European Commission: Directorate-General for Research and Innovation (DG RTD), Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development (DG AGRI), Directorate-General for Environment (DG ENV), representatives and experts from Member States, representatives of the SCAR and the BIOEAST Initiative, policymakers, researchers, agricultural advisors, representatives of international institutions, initiatives and projects, as well as the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission, the Circular Bio-based Europe Joint Undertaking (CBE JU), representatives of academia, agricultural institutions, non-governmental organisations, other representatives of institutions related to the subject of the conference.

On 10 June 2025 the Plenary Meeting of the SCAR as well the BIOEAST Initiative meeting took place the day before the high-level conference, discussing - among others - the draft needs and gaps analysis as a follow-up to the Council conclusions approved at the Competitiveness Council on 29 November 2024 on “A potential Europe-wide R&I initiative on advancing sustainable natural resource management, food systems security and the deployment of the bioeconomy harnessing the potential of Central and Eastern Europe”.

The Polish Presidency has highlighted the 7 dimensions of security, under the motto "Security, Europe". One of these pillars is food security. One of the key priorities of the Polish Presidency is research, innovation and digitisation to advance the competitiveness of European agriculture and ensure food security.

The conference provided a platform for high-level discussion on the challenges for science and policy in the context of the European Commission's Vision for Agriculture and Food, as well as the forthcoming Life Sciences and the new Bioeconomy Strategy.

The aim of the conference was to discuss and exchange views on the role of research and innovation in strengthening the green and digital transformation of the agri-food sector, as well as the development of the bioeconomy in the BIOEAST region, Central and Eastern European countries and the EU as a whole.

The event also aimed to foster cooperation between Central and Eastern European countries, promote a coherent European Research Area and strengthen cooperation between the scientific community, practitioners and policymakers. The event created space for presenting scientific achievements, as well as exchanging of practical ideas and innovative solutions in the agri-food sector.

Research, innovation and digitalisation are key enablers to enhance sustainable competitiveness, chart pathways towards sustainability and ensure long-term food security. They are crucial in developing new technologies and innovative solutions and are the main response to structural, climate and geopolitical challenges. This approach requires good cooperation between practice, science and public administration. International and macro-regional cooperation can significantly accelerate progress and bring significant added value.

Policy outlook session 1. Setting the Scene: Competitiveness Compass. Policy priorities for R&I under competitiveness compass - the importance of the life science, bioeconomy and digital strategies to explore future research and innovation orientations and levers of change.

The session explored the strategic approach to enhance the competitiveness of the bioeconomy through innovation and technological advancements. The session highlighted the challenges and potential in Central and Eastern Europe for closing innovation gaps in the agri-food sector with focus on aligning with the strategic priorities of the European Union policies in the context of current global challenges.

The importance of coherence and capacity building was emphasised, along with the highlighted potential of research, innovation, and digitalisation.

Policy outlook session 2. Setting the Scene: Increasing the competitiveness of European agriculture and ensuring food security. The Vision for Agriculture and Food.

The session served as a pivotal policy platform to discuss the competitiveness of European agriculture, taking into account the need to ensure food security.

In this context, the session provided an opportunity to address the most pressing challenges in sustainable agri-food systems, digital and green transformation of the agri-food sector and bioeconomy development in CEE region and the EU.

Thus, it indicated possible directions for the implementation of the Vision for Agriculture and Food in response to the question of how research, innovation and digitalisation can help to achieve the Vision goals.

The session permitted discussion on the political Vision for agriculture and food after 2027 in light of the current state of agriculture in the EU-27 and CEE. The in-depth political panel discussion focused o the future actions needed to improve sustainability, competitiveness and resilience of the agricultural sector, and stressed the key enabling role of science, research and innovation, knowledge, digitalisation and the bioeconomy in improving the competitiveness of European agriculture. The impact of generational renewal on the process of implementing innovation and modernisation in agriculture was underlined and the need for a strong CAP and strong R&I investment in the sector.

Policy outlook session 3: BIOEAST and Beyond. Fostering Collaboration Through Europe-wide R&I initiative, harnessing the potential of Central and Eastern Europe. Introductory session to the thematic areas' sessions for the afternoon.

The session reviewed conclusions from the BIOEAST and Beyond conference held under the Hungarian EU Council Presidency. It aimed to advance the BIOEAST Vision on 'Partnering for the Future' by boosting sustainability and competitiveness via the bioeconomy research and innovation ecosystem in BIOEAST countries.

Additionally, the session addressed future governance, key challenges, strategic areas such as water and soil management, sustainable food systems, and bioeconomy deployment. It also discussed how to follow up on a draft gap analysis to harness the potential of CEE countries and strengthen the European Research Area.

Thematic outlook session 4: Research and Innovation for competitive, sustainable and resilient agri-food systems - setting the direction of the policy-science-practice collaboration in building the future strategic approach in R&I on food systems.

This session focused on setting the direction of policy-science-practice collaboration in building a future strategic approach for R&I on food systems. Cooperation between science and policy makers towards future R&I on food systems was discussed, both from the European Commission, and the Member States' perspectives.

Dialogue between research and public policy-making is crucial to properly guide the transformation of agri-food systems, this is possible in research framework programmes, initiatives for monitoring and observation of agri-food systems and a better understanding of the directions of desired change and good communication with farmers, business and consumers.

The transformation of agri-food systems requires cross-sectoral cooperation, involvement of practice and public policy measures to create an inclusive environment for change. Interdisciplinary and multinational projects and initiatives play an important role in this process, as they enable the building of broad partnerships for future development.

Thematic outlook session 5: Research and Innovation in the way for future concept of bioeconomy - a comprehensive overview of biomass availability in Europe & the essential role of research, innovation, and international cooperation in driving sustainable development through the bioeconomy.

The session opened with an overview of regional biomass availability in Europe (biomass supply and uses in the EU). This provided the strategic context for a forward-looking discussion on the sustainable supply and uses of biomass within the EU towards 2050, highlighting the critical balance between environmental limits and growing bio-based demand and competition for biomass between different sectors.

Attention then turned to the policy instruments and financial mechanisms designed to accelerate investment in the bioeconomy, including Horizon Europe, the CBE JU, as well as various regional and national initiatives aimed at scaling up innovation and industrial deployment in the bio-based sector.

A key challenge is to unlock and activate the potential already created through existing R&D and pilot projects. These efforts now need to be scaled up in order to fully capitalise on existing innovations and stimulate the development of new solutions.

Thematic outlook session 6: Research and Innovation for Natural Resource Sustainability Soil Health, Freshwater, Climate - the importance of research and innovation for soil and water sustainability, aligning with the EU Soil Mission, and broader objectives of sustainable resource management.

The session highlighted the research and innovation needs for soil and water management and broader objectives of sustainable resource management recognising that many pioneering farmers and land stewards across Europe are already successfully applying soil and water regenerative practices. The session highlighted the progress made by supporting place based innovation and demonstration, with the first Living labs supported under the Mission Soil. These proven solutions provide a strong foundation for broader uptake. The session highlighted the further challenges in such areas as soil regeneration and integrating soil and water management into broader picture of natural resource sustainability and climate resilience. In order to address the current challenges, wider application of soil regeneration into agricultural advisory processes is necessary. Many soils and water regenerative or protective practices have been tested but their transfer to practice is still insufficient.

Therefore to scale up successful practices, living labs, coordinated financial instruments and enabling public-private regulatory environments is essential. It was highlighted that Mission Soil strongly contributes to development and implementation of sustainable soil management through financing research and innovation, and involving societies in this process. Living Labs are powerful tools for co-creation of most innovative and effective solutions across land use types. Links between the bioeconomy, including biomass conversion to soil amendments, and soil health was emphasised to involve soil management in circularity strategies.

DAY 2 Plenary Session 1: Governance for Digital Transition in the Agri-Food Sector - Digitalisation as a driver to further advance the transition.

The session highlighted the role of digital transition that can help agriculture and rural areas face a variety of challenges, such as climate change, environmental degradation, geopolitical instability, changing supply networks and evolving consumer demand. Examples of initiatives and actions to support developments of digitalisation were presented.

The insights into policy strategies, instruments and initiatives to support agricultural digitalisation on EU and national level, were provided. The session was an opportunity to focus on the key enablers that support the process of digital transformation, for the adoption and use of digital technologies. The discussion focused on support instruments that are needed to accelerate the digital transition in agriculture and rural areas. Key EU initiatives on data sharing and management, data governance, as well as initiative to support testing robotic and AI-based solutions in the agri-food sector, were presented. The role of co-creation and cooperation was highlighted in implementation of digital innovative solutions under EIP Operational Groups.

DAY 2 Plenary practical Session 2: Increase of research impact by putting practitioners (end-users) into the centre of the R&I activities all over the project cycle – the role of interaction between different actors along the agri-food chain, including farmers, advisors, researchers, policy makers in achieving common goals and innovative solutions to enhance the transition to a socio-economic and environmentally sustainable agriculture.

Strong and well operating Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS) facilitate interaction among different partners and help them achieve common goals. It is key for fostering knowledge and innovation in agriculture and rural areas. R&I projects develop new knowledge and innovative solutions, however, it is also essential to support sharing of knowledge and innovative solutions.

The session focused on the role of co-operation/co-creation and knowledge sharing in ensuring that R&I solutions are applied in practice, underling the role of advisory services as key intermediaries between research and practice.

There are good practices and instruments supporting multi-actor approach and knowledge exchange at country and EU level. The need to provide synergies between existing instruments were also emphasised. Furthermore, drawing on current experience the session highlighted further challenges in developing AKIS.

DAY 2 Plenary practical Session 3: Governance for Food Systems Transformation– education, research and innovation perspective. Achievements & good examples of initiatives to explore future research and innovation orientations and levers of change.

The session brought together achievements in EU food systems, related good examples of initiatives to explore future research, and innovation orientations and levers of change. Joint dialogue, identification of research priorities and appropriate targeting of collaborative projects under the EU's framework programme are necessary to achieve the goals of transforming food systems in Europe more quickly. The session presented how research-driven initiatives can shape food system governance, emphasising the role of science-based policymaking, digital transformation, and multi-stakeholder engagement in advancing sustainable food systems and in creating a new ecosystem of institutions working for better governance of food systems.

The presentations and discussion in the session illustrated the possibilities for building partnerships between representatives of different sectors and between thematic networks. Fostering an inclusive environment for the transformation of different elements of food systems and to support their sustainable development in future was highlighted.

DAY 2 Plenary practical Session 4: Governance for Bioeconomy development– education, research and innovation perspective. Inspiring examples of successful bioeconomy projects and initiatives including regional excellence to explore future research and innovation orientations and levers of change.

The session was opened with an overview of projects providing solutions for bioeconomy development, the strategic context for a forward-looking discussion in frame of innovation-oriented research projects or research and policy support.

The CBE-JU also launched its working group dedicated to primary producers in the margins of the high-level conference on 10 June 2025 in Warsaw. Outcomes from the meeting was presented during the session.

To ground the discussion in practice, the session highlighted successful bioeconomy projects and initiatives emerging from Central and Eastern Europe. These included inspiring examples of regional excellence — such as bio-based product innovations, local clusters, hubs, and multi-actor partnerships — demonstrating the potential of place-based innovation to support a fair and green transition. This session also highlighted the role of bioeconomy education and key strategic areas that need to be addressed, on the example of the BIOEAST macro-region.

Conclusion

The high-level conference “Research, innovation and digitalisation to advance the competitiveness of European agriculture and ensure food security" proved that research, innovation and digitalisation are key enablers in increasing the sustainable competitiveness and resilience of the European agri-food sector. They are key in achieving the goals of the new European Commission’s Vision for Agriculture and Food, as well as the forthcoming Life Sciences and the new Bioeconomy Strategy. R&I are crucial for developing new technologies and innovative solutions responding to structural, climate and geopolitical challenges. This requires good cooperation between practice, science and public administration. International and macro-regional cooperation can significantly accelerate progress and bring significant added value. Interdisciplinary and multinational projects and initiatives play an important role in this process, as they enable the building of broad partnerships for future development.

There is a need to provide appropriate instruments and initiatives to boost implementation of innovative solutions, which are essential for facing environmental and climate challenges. There will be no innovation in agriculture on a large scale without relevant skills, generational renewal and cooperation.

The conference provided evidence that actions integrating researchers, practitioners, decision makers, advisors and the other relevant actors are valuable and need to be continued and further developed. The conference highlighted the need to do R&I with farmers, for farmers, and on real sites.

It highlighted the need for further efforts to develop AKIS to strengthen knowledge exchange and implementation of innovative practice driven solutions responding to needs of farmers.

Taking into account that digitalisation is a driving force for further transformation in the agricultural sector, it is important to provide support instruments to ensure favourable conditions for farmers to exploit the potential of digital solution. The upcoming EU digitalisation strategy for agriculture could help to achieve these faster.

The outcomes of the conference contribute to further development of the future EU policies and strategic frameworks, including CAP, Framework Programme 2028-2035, and new EU strategic approach to R&I and to improve the competitiveness of agriculture, forestry and rural areas.

The high-level conference “Research, innovation and digitalisation to advance the competitiveness of European agriculture and ensure food security" has set a strong foundation for advancing research and innovation in the CEE region and benefitting the whole of Europe. In the light of those outcomes, the Polish Presidency calls for actions, especially counting on the BIOEAST Initiative, which strengthen institutionalised cooperation in research, innovation and digitalisation. As next steps, a roadmap should be developed to further explore the scope and form of a Europe-wide R&I initiative that harnesses the capacities of CEE Member States, the Western Balkans and candidate countries and strengthens the European Research Area.

In the light of those outcomes, the Polish Presidency calls for actions to foster research, innovation, digitalisation and cooperation to advance the competitiveness of European agriculture and ensure food security.