In light of the tragic events that took place this year in Brussels and the world, the ELO team would like to dedicate this Activity Report to all those who were affected by the terrorist attacks.
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ABREVIATIONS
2017 was not an easy year for the agricultural and environment community in Brussels. On many policy issues, it seems that oppositions are hardening and contrasts sharpening. Left or right, Europe or Brexit, Trump or Hillary – it can seem at times that the centre cannot hold.

For us, there is no one solution that will cure all, no silver bullet. There are advantages to small farms and big ones, industrial and conventional. What is much more important is the determination and goals of the managers. At the ELO, our members are of all sizes, shapes and business practices; what unites us are respect for property rights and the determination to create profitable and sustainable businesses that we can leave to the next generation.

This attitude is what has driven us to create the Forum for the Future of Agriculture (FFA), which saw its 10th anniversary in 2017, and which included a special address from both the Vatican and former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan. We know that the future of agriculture depends on both food and environmental security, and that we must continue to test new solutions and make room for new ideas. I remain proud of having assisted in its founding, and remain thankful to our partners at Syngenta and Deutz Fahr, as well as the FFA’s excellent Chairman, Janez Potočnik, whose vision keeps driving the event to ever greater heights.

The 2020 Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reform will be one of the best ways we can set out our new European and national priorities. By giving Member States increased national control over implementation and management, better, more localised solutions, and less regulation will be possible. I join the European Commission in their desire to achieve this. The last CAP reform has shown that a top-down approach is excellent at creating misunderstanding and red tape on the ground, but fewer results than we might hope for.

However, we must be careful about what we wish for. A decentralised, renationalised CAP should not lead to fundamental divergences between Member States, nor should it lead to a race to the bottom for the environment. Furthermore, we must also take care that we do not create administrative shock if we transfer complex control mechanisms to national governments who have for decades depended on the EU to do this work for them. A sudden increase in national responsibilities may not be achievable even within the timeframe of one CAP reform.

Regrettfully, the antagonism that is spreading in Europe is most visible in how we approach crop protection in Europe. Last year’s acrimonious debate on glyphosate continued for most of 2017, coming to a very late close in November when glyphosate was granted a five-year license extension. During this debate, there was almost no centre ground left - you had to choose a side and commit yourself. We chose to be on the side of our members, science, and common sense by supporting a full 15-year renewal. We did so because we believe that if we allow the debate on agricultural technologies to be defined by how people feel rather than by scientific results and reason, then that would set a highly dangerous, if not fatal precedent for Europe. Of course, we remain supportive of serious efforts in agroecology, organic farming and other methods that seek different paths and create increasingly sustainable outcomes.

Fortunately, we are able to showcase that diversity and public-private partnerships are able to create great results. Our Wildlife Estates project keeps growing. Not long ago, we added 20 more estates in Belgium. By showing what we do and backing up our conclusions through our scientific committee, we seek to showcase the immense contribution that land managers everywhere can make to increase biodiversity in Europe. Due to the commitment of its staff and members, Wildlife Estates is leading the way in creating a network for private conservation.

In these times of opposition and change, it is important to remember that cooperation can still be a virtue. In the countryside, it is a necessity. We know that no-one stands alone, that we depend on each other, the environment and a good climate to harvest our crops and feed our fellow citizens. We should take care that we do not forget these lessons ourselves, and reach out to the wider world to teach them the same.

Thierry de l’Escaille
Secretary General of the ELO
European Landowners’ Organization

The European Landowners’ Organization (ELO), created in 1972, is a unique federation of national associations from the 28 EU Member States and beyond, which represents the interests of landowners, land managers, and rural entrepreneurs at the European political level.

Independent and non-profit making, the ELO is the only organisation able to stand up for all rural entrepreneurs. The secretariat is based in Brussels and provides support for the member organisations on all facets of the modern countryside, which covers over 90% of the EU28’s land area.

The ELO promotes a prosperous countryside through the pillars of private property rights, sustainable land use, and profitable rural businesses. Its policy recommendations are developed by engaging with European, national, and international stakeholders, and uphold our values. The ELO supports its policy work with practical projects and actions across Europe that demonstrate the value of private land management. Our policy work and project results are shared with key actors from the rural sector and policymakers at different events at the local, regional, national, and European level.

In order to have balanced development for rural and urban areas, it is necessary to deliver both a competitive and sustainable economic future for Europe. Climate change and biodiversity loss create short and long-term challenges for our members and their enterprises. The ELO and its members are therefore committed to a balanced approach between strong economic performance and prudent use of natural resources.

Through its unique combination of policy work, practical initiatives, and events, the ELO maintains a unique position across the agricultural, environmental and rural sectors in Brussels and throughout Europe.

www.elo.org
In January, RISE kicked off what became an intense year for debate on the future of European agricultural policy with a workshop on the CAP at the European Parliament. This was quickly followed up by the release of its final report Thinking out of the box: Further modernisation of the CAP - what, why and how, as part of the Forum for the Future of Agriculture in March.

A new H2020 project, SYSTEMIC, started in June. SYSTEMIC, a consortium of 15 partners in 7 member states, aims to identify new market orientated approaches to recover and recycle valuable mineral components from organic waste streams. As a work package leader, RISE is responsible for the dissemination, policy work and synthesis of information. In 2017 and into 2018, the policy work will focus on primarily on the Nitrates Directive and the new Fertiliser Regulation.

Also in June, RISE officially started its project on Livestock, ‘The Optimal Scale and Balance of Livestock in the EU’. This new study, due to be released in June 2018, will review current evidence on the state and play of the livestock sector and its impacts and trends in order to better understand if there is a definable concept of balanced livestock production for Europe. And if so, what would this balanced system look like in scale and species makeup and what policies would be needed to guide such change and support the sector through the transition to a more balanced state.

All RISE publications and projects can be viewed at www.risefoundation.eu
The 20th anniversary General Assembly returned to Belgium and Hex Castle. During the special celebration, President Michael zu SALM-SALM extended a warm thanks to Johan NORDENFALK, Karl GROTHENFELT, Giuseppe VISCONTI and Thierry de l’ESCAILLE who helped found the organisation and have supported it ever since.

Ghislain d’URSEL, FCS Board Member and owner of the Hex Castle, welcomed the delegates and invited them to stay in the afternoon to discover the castle, its magnificent gardens, and old rosary. Janez PO-TOČNIK, chair of Forum for the Future of Agriculture, former Commissioner DG Environment, delivered the opening statement of the conference. At the gala dinner Johan NORDENFALK presented the Anders WALL Award. The FAMIGRO PRIZE, created by the FCS and Karl GROTHENFELT to support young entrepreneurs was also presented.

On the 3rd of June, the FCS had the opportunity to choose among a number of site-visits, showing diverse management aspects as agriculture and forestry, hunting grounds, entrepreneurship in an historical castle, wildlife estates and biodiversity. On Sunday some 20 Friends continued for a post-conference tour, discovering magnificent estates and castles from Belgium, where the friends were hosted by the owners.

The General Assembly 2018 will take place in Lake Constance (Switzerland) from 10th to 13th of May, where the board member Nicolas de Buman, will introduce us into four countries (Germany, Austria, Liechtenstein and Switzerland), hosted by landowners of the area as the Württemberg royal family, the Princely family von Liechtenstein and the Counts Bernadotte.

www.friendsofthecountryside.org
The FCE began in Paris at the Club de la Chasse et de la Nature before leaving to Anjou the next day. There the Young Friends were welcomed by Charles-André DE COSSEE-BRISSAC who explained the long and interesting history of the Chateau de Brissac. In the afternoon, the Young Friends left to la Touchadière and were welcomed by Mr. and Mrs. Arnaud HEIM DE BALSAC. At la Touchadière where the conference was held, YFCS members had the chance to listen to entrepreneurs who explained their ideas and how these transition into successful businesses.

The Young Friends would like to thank their generous hosts for their generous welcome and support! In addition, the FCE relied upon the organisation of our French ambassadors Alix DE PUINEUF and Louis-Victor DOUVILLE DE FRANSSU who have now joined the YFCS Board.

For the first time the Young Friends held their General Assembly together with the Friends of the Countryside in Belgium in June 2017. At Hex Castle the Young Friends updated the audience on recent developments within their organisation before heading on to holding their GA at Aldenbiesen. The Young Friends were then welcomed by William DE GRUNNE at Schoonbeck estate and were introduced to various topics surrounding Schoonbeck estate from the perspective of a Young Friend.

www.yfcs.eu
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ISSUES AND POLICIES
The Common Agricultural Policy

2017 was marked by discussions over simplification and the future of the CAP that has culminated with the European Commission’s communication on “Future of food and Farming” in November. The communication has refreshed the discussions after the wide-ranging consultation, which received more than 322,000 submissions.

While there have been calls for radical change, this reform process is more of an “evolution rather than a revolution”. This is an understandable position due to the uncertainties regarding the budget, the European Parliament elections and the change of current college of commissioners in 2019.

The ELO welcomed the communication and the intention to explain the need for a well-funded CAP beyond 2020. The sector faces an increased number of challenges while being asked to contribute to a wide range of goals. Our view is that CAP supports should help farming make the transition to invest in innovative technologies to improve productivity and resource efficiency and to cope with the challenges of a changing climate.

The ELO suggested a support system structured around the concept of land management for food and environmental security that focuses on objectives rather than being driven by pure compliance considerations that are often too bureaucratic.

In 2018, the ELO will continue to engage in discussions on the future of the CAP, in particular on the content and details of the CAP strategic plans. This is the most radical thinking in the paper, as it represents a new decentralised delivery model to ‘bolster environmental care and climate action’.

The ELO will continue to use its well-established structures, take part of the relevant Civil Dialogue Groups and will continue to organise several meetings to gather the views of different stakeholders on the future of the CAP, ahead of the legislative proposals on the future farm policy design expected in the summer of 2018, soon after the Multi-annual Financial Framework (MFF) proposals, for the period from 2021 onwards.
Biodiversity and Natura 2000

2017 was a critical year for ELO on the Biodiversity and Natura 2000 dossiers as the European Commission published its Communication on an “Action plan for nature, people and the economy”. It is defining the four priority areas of an Action Plan for a more efficient implementation of the Nature Directives following the findings of the FITNESS check.

The Communication is accompanied by a Commission Staff Working document with fact sheets comprising priority actions for each priority area in the Action plan. All the actors contributed and reacted to this EC document including the EP and the CoR now participating to the process. The Action Plan is not only a DG ENV document but the collective work of a working group consisting of many Commission services under the supervision of two of the Commission Vice-Presidents.

The Action Plan was largely debated during processes ELO was actively involved in, thanks to the inputs of its members. Two important topics will be dealt separately from the Action Plan: the pollinator initiative and the Green Infrastructure due early 2018.

The important contribution of landowners and managers to the delivery of environmental benefits to the society were also promoted by ELO in 2017 during the CGBN, Nature Directors Meetings, or more technical meetings such as the MAES-Mapping and Assessment of Ecosystems and their Service, or the biogeographical seminars. To increase the visibility of the landowners contribution to biodiversity enhancement, ELO with the Natura 2000 Users Forum launched a survey on Cultural Ecosystem Services and will publish the results in 2018. Invasive Alien species dossier was also important as the Commission publish new list of species of Union concern. ELO is closely following the file and will benefit from the input of its members during the working groups planned in 2018.

ELO is not only advocating for better acknowledgement of the landowners contribution to biodiversity during technical meetings but also showcasing and testing on the ground good management practices through the programmes it is developing such as the Wildlife Estate label, the Horizon 2020 projects, the Erasmus projects and the Awards.
To meet these challenges, the modern farm business should not just embrace the latest tools and technologies, but also work out its own innovative practices. This quest, therefore, does not just take place in the laboratories of agricultural industries, but very much in the fields of our members.

Over the last few years, the EU has shown increased support for integrating the concept of innovation into European policy. In 2013, the European Commission set up the European Innovation Partnership (EIP). This is in addition to the Horizon 2020 programme, which is the biggest EU Research and Innovation programme ever, with nearly €80 billion in funding available over 7 years (2014 to 2020). Horizon 2020 is the financial instrument that is implementing the Innovation Union, a Europe 2020 flagship initiative aimed at securing Europe’s global competitiveness.

In 2016, the ELO continued to push for more and better access to agricultural innovation. One of the main sticking points remains the continued uncertainty over the legal status of the new suite of plant breeding techniques such as CRISPR. While the recent opinion of the Advocate General of the European Court of Justice shows that there is at least some leeway for these tools, regulatory certainty should be ensured without delay to allow these tools to be used on the field once they are proven to be safe for human health and the environment.

The ELO has been encouraged by the uptake of digital farming, especially the reference to these technologies in the recent CAP Communication. While these tools are exceptionally promising, affordability and rural broadband access remain an issue in Europe.

Innovation

The ELO strongly believes that only continuous innovation in the agricultural sector can deliver the results needed for Europe’s land managers; flourishing farm businesses at a time of unstable commodity and energy prices, better results for our ecosystems, and plenty of safe food for Europe’s consumers.
Digital Farming

Clearly one of the biggest themes in agriculture and land management in the 21st century will be the ongoing digitalisation of farm management. These technologies provide extraordinary opportunities to increase farm efficiency, boost production, and vastly reduce input use, thereby helping to reduce pressures on the environment.

There is no single defining characteristic for digital farming. It can generally be understood as holistic systems that can combine farm data from several sources. Drones and satellites can provide aerial data such as detailed terrain mapping, information on soil types, and detailed weather predictions; soil sensors can provide real-time nitrogen and phosphorus data; and cloud-based IT systems create user-friendly maps and advice. The latest agricultural machinery is designed to act as a focal point for this information.

However, key issues still remain before this technology is widely taken up. One of the key issues is around data management and privacy. There are clear advantages for both farmers and companies to pool data from different properties to create better regional or even country-wide strategies, but how can farmers, companies, and other stakeholders be sure that their data is managed securely and with the right level of consent?

Furthermore, large parts of the European countryside are still not equipped with high-speed internet or 4G (and higher) mobile data connections. Without these, many of the new digital tools do not have the necessary networks to talk to each other or send and receive the large quantities of data needed to carry out analysis. In the 2017 Communication on the future of the CAP, both the benefits and stumbling blocks of digital farming were highlighted, and it is clear that substantial public investments will need to be made in order to make these new technologies broadly available in the EU.
Crop Protection

A great portion of European agriculture depends on the use of crop protection products. Without these, farmers would lose staggering amounts of yield and consumers would be at serious risk of food-borne diseases. Out of necessity, the crop protection tools must be toxic, otherwise they would not counteract the pests, diseases, and weeds that can cause serious harm to our food supply. The ELO fully understands that this toxicity is a matter of concern to many.

However, Europe currently appears to be on an unsustainable track of removing such products from the market without providing adequate alternatives to farmers, or even forcing them to rely on other, often more harmful, products and methods.

In 2017, the continuing debate on glyphosate demonstrated the deeply entrenched positions on these issues, where many Member States and policy-makers continued to resist the re-authorisation even after the European Chemicals Agency, along with most worldwide regulators, confirmed that it was not carcinogenic. After a last-minute change at the standing committee, the licence for glyphosate was renewed for 5 years, even though a full 15 year renewal was wholly supported by procedure and scientific evidence.

The European Parliament also rejected the European Commission’s proposal for endocrine disruption as they considered it not sufficiently protective of human health. These proposals could have a severe impact on many active ingredients and products currently in use by farmers.

Next year, we can expect a renewed discussion on the neonicotinoid class of chemicals as the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) releases its findings, as well as a new EU Communication on pollinator health.
A way of using resources more efficiently is by moving towards a circular economy rather than a traditional linear economy, thus keeping resources in use for as long as possible and recovering them whenever possible. For instance, bio-waste, including food waste, is estimated at up to 138 million tons per year in the EU (of which up to 40% goes to landfill). The EU Commission adopted a proposal on the circular economy, which actions are still being implemented. In 2017 the EU focused on waste and started the discussion on food waste, which will continue in 2018.

The bioeconomy comprises those parts of the economy that use renewable biological resources from land and sea – such as crops, forests, fish, animals and micro-organisms – to produce food, materials and energy. The European Commission has set a Bioeconomy Strategy and action plan which focuses on three key aspects: developing new technologies and processes for the bioeconomy; developing markets and competitiveness in bioeconomy sectors; and pushing policymakers and stakeholders to work more closely together.

Both the circular and the bioeconomy are key concepts for enabling the transition to a low carbon economy, combating climate change and reaching the sustainable development goals. Nonetheless, one needs to be mindful that any advancement of scientific knowledge with the view to innovation is fundamental both towards the further implementation of both strategies.

The ELO has been vocal in both initiatives and has addressed the issue in events such as the Forum for the Future of Agriculture and through Intergroup meetings in the EU Parliament.

In 2018, the ELO will follow the recently published revision of the EU’s bioeconomy strategy. Regarding the Circular Economy initiatives, the ELO will keep an eye on the Monitoring Framework at EU and national level.
Forestry

2017 was marked by discussions over the potential of forests to reduce GHG emissions, the use of biomass for energy, criticisms over the Polish government handling of the beetle problem in the Białowieża Forest and the devastating number and intensity of wildfires in parts of Europe.

The Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry (LU-LUCF) regulation that was agreed, sets accounting rules for the CO2 emissions and sequestration in land use and forestry against 2030 reduction goals. Growing forests absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, wood products store carbon over the years of their use, and the substitution effect due to the replacement of non-renewable materials and fossil fuels is significant in terms of GHG savings. The regulation encourages Member States to continue using their growing forest resources sustainably in order to decarbonise the European economy, thus avoiding outsource the provision of sustainable raw materials for our bioeconomy in non-EU countries.

The Directive on the Promotion of the Use of Energy from Renewable Sources also led to heated discussions during the year. Even with some setbacks, the legislation recognises the importance of forests and their role in tackling climate change. In the specific case of bioenergy, the carbon released during biomass combustion is balanced by the forest growth from which the biomass is sourced. Biomass for energy can be directly supplied from forests or as a by-product of industry. Developing new markets and end uses for all types of biomass from forests could increase the efficient use of currently unused feedstock, such as the raw material derived from thinning. One of the main compromises was the “risk-based” approach for biomass, which takes into account existing legislation and tools on sustainable forest management to address sustainability concerns.

The controversy over the logging in Poland’s Białowieża Forest was the topics that got more media attention. Białowieża is the gateway to Europe’s most primateval forest but was also the centre of a battle about the future of the forest. As a consequence, the European Union decided to refer Poland to the Court of Justice of the EU for increased logging in a protected Natura 2000 site, without a proper assessment of its impacts. While a political issue, this led to the renewed discussions over Natura 2000 management.

The number of forest fires in the EU has more than doubled in 2017, which was particularly bad in Portugal, where the fires claimed more than a hundred victims. Experts have blamed climate change for the rise, saying it has extended the traditional wildfire season from two to up to five months and increased the frequency of blazes. Portugal, Italy and Croatia have all been hit amid high temperatures and lower-than-normal rainfall.

These are vivid reminders of the necessity to actively manage forests and make them resilient in a changing climate, with increase forest fire and disease risks. Actively and sustainably managed forests are essential to allow the EU to play a leading role in combining environmental resilience with societal needs and economic development. Sustainable Forest Management takes into account the ecosystem processes that contribute to timber production, climate regulation and biodiversity conservation, without them being mutually exclusive. However, the potential for these synergies should be better recognised by decision makers and capitalized on by forest managers.

To deal with all these issues, the ELO remains an active member of the Commission’s Advisory Group on Forest and Cork and works closely together with the main forestry producer’s organisations in Brussels.

In 2018, the ELO will focus on the review of the European Forest Strategy (EUFS). While the responsibility remains in the Member States, the EUFS provides synergies and coherence with the different policy areas that affect forests. It not only addresses key issues like rural development and biodiversity but stresses the importance of forests in terms of the forest-based industries, bio-energy and climate change mitigation.
Land Access and Property Rights

The ELO is founded on the belief that private property rights and a well-functioning land market are fundamental in delivering both sustainability and profitability in the European countryside.

The ongoing CAP reform discussions have enhanced the debate on access to agricultural land. Unfortunately, many wish to support abstract notions of the small or family farm, without taking into account their context, economic viability or environmental impact. A focus on size foregoes a much more relevant debate about the impact of the operator.

ELO recognizes the specific nature of agricultural land, emphasizing however that acquisition of farmland or forestry must comply with ‘four fundamental freedoms’ (the free movement of persons, goods, services, and capital) to ensure equal rights for all EU citizens throughout the European Union. Even if remaining a matter within the competency of each Member State, it is also governed by EU law, and as such has to follow it. Clear guidelines, such as those stated in the ‘Commission Interpretative Communication on the Acquisition of Farmland and European Union Law’ (published in October) are necessary to avoid other countries introducing farmland regulations in breach of EU laws.

Working daily on access to agricultural land and forestry, taxation, inheritance, land tenure contracts, and ownership and management of land, ELO believes that respect for property rights, as well as long-term vision and legal stability, are the only path to ensure a profitable agriculture sector and therefore a decent living for farmers, land managers and landowners. In 2017 we promoted those ideas on various occasion, with a special emphasis on the “Exchange of views on the access and use of farmland” in partnership with the President of the Intergroup «Biodiversity, Hunting and Countryside»; and with the European Commission (ELO General Assembly in Sofia).

ELO will continue to work on those topics, believing that it is fundamentally much more important to introduce positive incentives than to impose restrictions.
Starting in 2016, The ELO has been pursuing a number of campaigns which positively influence the revision of two energy efficiency legislations at the EU level: the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive (EPBD) and the Energy Efficiency Directive (EED), as well as the Renewable Energy Directive (RED). The goal of these campaigns is to prevent measures that affect owners of private houses negatively, such as the installation of new individual remotely readable meters and new requirements attached to the already existing energy performance certificates (EPC).

As part of these campaigns, ELO and its partner organisations held a Parliamentary Breakfast on “Reconciling energy efficiency and housing affordability”. The event offered a platform to discuss the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive (EPBD) provisions currently under revision. This event allowed stakeholders to meet with Paul HODSON, Head of Unit, European Commission DG Energy, and four of the key MEPs on this file, Bendt BENDTSEN, the European Parliament’s Rapporteur, Anneli JÄÄTTEENMÄKI, the Rapporteur for Opinion for the Parliament’s Environmental Committee, Mia-petra KUMPULA-NATRI, the Socialist Shadow Rapporteur, and Markus PIEPER, Shadow Rapporteur for the Energy Efficiency Directive, and to reflect on trade-offs between energy efficiency, electro-mobility renovation and housing affordability together.

The Association has also published a joint position paper with UIPI and EHHA on the Renewable Energy Directive (RED). Although the strategic use of renewables can help households and businesses reduce energy costs and environmental footprint, we are advocating for the Directive to remain flexible regarding the use of minimum levels of renewables in buildings undergoing major renovation. The extent to which our interests were discussed between the European institutions (mainly the European Commission and the European Parliament from the outset) is particularly gratifying.
PROJECTS
REVAB

The lack of use for existing agricultural buildings is one of the challenges faced by the rural areas in the last years. The potential for reuse is huge, especially to recreate centers of rural living, but there is a crucial need to get access to training and real experiences.

The REVAB project (REuse and Valorization of Agricultural Buildings through training based on real experiences), funded by the Erasmus + Programme, is composed of partners from six European countries collaborating together for 30 months to enhance the enormous potential for reuse of existing agricultural buildings. A training system based on case studies and Open Educational Resources (OER) are tools foreseen to help to realize that objective.

The REVAB project:
- Fosters as entrepreneurial approach of the use of existing agricultural buildings
- Stimulates rural entrepreneurs, rural land and real estate owners and young farmers to think about possibilities to (-re) use and valorization of existing agricultural real estate and farmstead respecting economic, ecologic and social impacts
- Seeks to avoid further consumption of agricultural land.

2017 was an industrious year as partners created the first comprehensive, flexible and fully open-source training system for the reuse and valorization of agricultural buildings. Four on-line modules and a “serious game” were created, with the pilot testing phase foreseen for spring 2018. The tools, available in EN, FR, IT, ES, BG, DE, PL will be presented to the general public during the REVAB final conference taking place in Brussels on the 23 April.

ELO is proud to be part of this project to help keep rural areas vibrant and accessible to different countryside entrepreneurs and land managers. Through re-using agricultural buildings, long-term investment can be created, secure jobs provided, and the sustainability of rural life increased.

www.revab-erasmus.com
@REVAB_PRJ
REVAB project

Project n°: 2015-1-BE01-KA202-013183
The CO-FARM (Enhancing COoperation amongst FARMing entrepreneurs) project was launched in November 2016 and is coordinated by Limerick Institute of Technology. The project develops training materials based on case studies that will provide rural entrepreneurs, rural landowners and farmers with the skills and knowledge to cooperate more effectively and in new ways.

Two project meetings were held in 2017; one in May in Augsburg, Germany, and another in September in Naklo, Slovenia. At the meeting in Augsburg, project partners presented the reports which they had worked on for Ireland, the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Spain and Tuscany, Italy. These capture the current situation in terms of cooperation between farmers in these regions and countries.

By the time the project partners met again in Naklo, Slovenia, they had come up with potential case studies which were presented to the rest of the group. These were evaluated by the whole consortium to narrow down the selection to the ones that are best suited for the training material, based on learning potential and representativeness of all the countries. The publication of the Summary Report was also finalized during the meeting which brings together the highlights on cooperation between farmers in each country.

The consortium will meet in Prague in spring 2018 where they will be hosted by project partner and ELO member, Asociace soukromého zemědělství.

Project Number: 2016-1-IE01-KA202-016870
European Agricultural Landscapes (EALs) have an important cultural value and play a crucial role in the conservation of biodiversity. Young farmers and landowners need to learn how to implement innovative farming techniques within these landscapes. The FEAL project is developing a flexible training system based on exchange of best practices which will provide farmers and landowners with the skills and knowledge they need to implement sustainable farming activities that make sense, both economically and environmentally.

In 2017, the project partners published National Reports for each country in the consortium and a Summary Report about the State of the Art in terms of the relationship between sustainable & multifunctional farming practices and EALs in the involved countries and in Europe on the whole.

The second step that was carried out this year was the selection of the case studies. The training system that will be developed by the FEAL project will be based on real-life examples of the possibilities brought about by sustainable & multifunctional farming practices. Very different examples were chosen which show a great variety of activities covering all kinds of initiatives.

The e-Atlas on European Agricultural Landscapes was also launched this year which is a joint project run by the Institute for Research on European Agricultural Landscapes e.V. (EUCALAND) and FEAL. The main aim of the e-Atlas is to provide a broad overview of European Agricultural Landscapes, with information on the legal situation, management, cultural aspects, literature, etc.

The project will keep evolving over the next two years, and in 2018 the final design of the case studies and training modules will be finalized.

Project Number: 2016-1-SKO1-KA202-022502

For more information, follow us on:
- [FEAL](http://feal-future.org/)
- [@FEAL_ERASMUS](http://feal-future.org/) 

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FARMID

The 2014-2020 CAP Reform highlighted that it is necessary to encourage creation of additional sources of revenue for farms and new jobs. Social entrepreneurship is identified as a new opportunity for farmers to deliver alternative services, diversify the scope of their activities and their role in society, and to have a positive impact on inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development in rural areas.

Intellectual disability affects about 1% of the population on the EU level, of which 85% have Mild Intellectual Disability (MID). The objective of the Erasmus+ FARMID project (FARming as an employment opportunity for people with Mild Intellectual Disability) is to promote employment of people with mild intellectual disabilities on family farms, which promotes social inclusion and improve the economic situation of family farms. However, land managers who wish to engage with such projects need to be properly trained to work with disabled people.

The project will create a training program for farmers, landowners and rural entrepreneurs with interactive learning materials to present special knowledge on how to train and work with employees with special needs.

The first step of the project will be to present an overview of the current situation, including national legislation in partners’ countries concerning social entrepreneurship and possible connections to the agricultural sector and to identify possibilities on how to establish social enterprises on farms for employment of people with mild intellectual disabilities. Then, case studies and best practices in the field of social entrepreneurship & agriculture in Europe and partners countries will be chosen for the training program.

Launched in 2017, the project will run for 30 months, gathering partners from Slovenia, Austria, Spain, Italy and Belgium.

Project Number: 2017-SI01-KA202-035535

For more information
Contact: servane.morand@elo.org
http://www.farmid.bc-naklo.si/
@FARMID_ERASMUS

Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union
CARE-T-FARMS

CARE-T-FARMS (Care Activities Raising Employment and Training on Farm Adaptation to Responsible and Mental Health Services) is a new project that was launched in December 2017. It is funded by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union under Key Action 2: Cooperation for Innovation and the Exchange of Good Practices.

The basis of the project is to create training materials that will give people the skills to increase the uptake of social farming across Europe. Social farming, also known as care farming, is based on the principle of using farming activities for therapeutic purposes in order to promote positive mental and physical health and wellbeing. It is typically associated with horticulture, animal assisted activities, and traditional food processing. It can be adapted to all ages and abilities. Three types of training materials will be developed as outputs from the project, each with their own target audience; farm workers, farm managers, and health and social care professionals.

In late 2017, the partners began working on compiling reports on the “state of the art” in terms of social farming in their own countries, with ELO working on a European overview. These will be the starting point in terms of seeing what the situation is on the ground for social farming in the represented countries. In summer 2018, project partners will convene in Granada, Spain to plan for the next stage of the project and review progress with the first lot of training materials.

Project Number: 2017-1-PL01-KA202-038380

For more information:

www.care-t-farms.eu
@CARE_T_FARMS
Care-T-Farms

Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union
The FORBIO (Fostering Sustainable Feedstock Production for Advanced Biofuels on underutilized land in Europe) project was launched in January 2016 and will run for three years. The purpose of the project is to develop a methodology for assessing the potential for producing biomass sustainably in Europe on what is termed “underutilized land”. This includes contaminated, abandoned, marginal, and fallow land.

The project sets out to assess the economic, social and environmental sustainability of producing biomass on land that is not in competition with food and feed production, or recreation and conservation.

The project focuses primarily on three countries: Ukraine, Italy, and Germany. Over the course of 2017, study tours were held in the Ivankiv region of Ukraine as part of the Kyiv Bioenergy Conference, and in the Brandenburg region of Germany. In Brandenburg the study tour was organized in the post-mining area of Welzow-Süd whereas the study tour in Ukraine focussed on sustainable biomass production on set-aside land.

Two new reports were published in 2017 as part of the project; a report on best practices for bioenergy policy, as well as a techno-economic report on the German case study.

As the project progresses, the partners will develop roadmaps on the removal of economic and non-economic barriers to sustainable bioenergy deployment in Europe and promote the development of partnerships between farmers, bioenergy producers, and local institutions. Awareness raising and capacity building activities are also planned to share lessons learnt from the project and to communicate on good practices.

www.forbio-project.eu
@FORBIO_H2020
Linkedin: Forbio project
YouTube: Project Forbio
In the coming year, case studies will be selected from this inventory and an in-depth comparative analysis will be made to compare different approaches to demonstration activities. The case studies will be representative of the great variety in agricultural systems across Europe, as well as the different ways demonstration activities are organised and designed.

AgriDemo-F2F works in partnership with a sister project called PLAID (Peer-to-peer Learning: Accessing Innovation through Demonstration) and we seek to have synergies between the two projects as well as joint communication. The two projects held joint meetings in Aberdeen in June 2017 where they were hosted by the James Hutton Institute. In 2018, AgriDemo-F2F meetings take place in Vienna, Austria and Chania, Greece. The meeting in Chania will coincide with the 13th European International Farming Systems Association (IFSA) Symposium.
It was launched in July 2017 and will run for three and a half years. The project brings together 15 partners from 8 countries. The project’s goal is to find out how nutrients in slaughterhouse wastewater can be recovered and transformed into raw materials to make organic fertilisers and biostimulant products. In addition to producing these agronomic products from an otherwise waste product, the project also aims to harness energy from the wastewater.

In 2017, ELO worked on developing stakeholder questionnaires as the starting point to engage people from different industries as well as civil society in the project. This is the first step in the stakeholder engagement strategy, which is part of the overall objective to increase the uptake of the technologies that will be developed over the course of the Water2REturn project, as well as to improve acceptance of this type of technology on the whole. ELO also produced a video in 2017 that will be used to raise awareness about the aims of project amongst a non-scientific audience. This was done to make sure research and innovation are more accessible and understandable to the general public and to show the added value of EU funding.

In 2018, ELO will cooperate with the Rural Investment Support for Europe (RISE) Foundation on finding synergies between Water2REturn and SYSTEMIC, a Horizon 2020 project that RISE is involved with which is about circular solutions for biowaste.

This project has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation programme under grant agreement No. 730398.
InnoForESt

The overarching goal of InnoForESt (Smart information, governance and business innovations for sustainable supply and payment mechanisms for forest ecosystem services) is to spark a transformation in the European forest sector by steering policies and businesses towards the provision of a wide range of forest ecosystem services. The project will showcase good practices, innovative governance approaches, and alternative income streams from forest ecosystem services across Europe. With the help of new alliances between actors within and beyond the forestry sector, these will be scientifically analyzed, further developed, and a set of recommendations will be disseminated.

InnoForESt has four main objectives:

- Synthesis of information on forest ecosystem service (ES) provision: What kind of innovations already exist for the sustainable provision and financing of forest ES?
- Classification of success factors of novel policy and business models: What are the influencing factors fostering or hindering governance innovation?
- Identification of upscaling and mainstreaming potentials: What are the implications for future governance approaches for forest ES provision on a larger scale?
- Provision of policy and business recommendations for successful implementation of governance innovations in real-world contexts.

InnoForESt will establish six real world pilots that represent a range of successful coordination approaches and business models. These case studies will be developed as examples that provide different kinds of forest ecosystem services with the help of different policy and business approaches.

The project will scale up the results to the European level by making use of Europe’s social-ecological landscape as well as the sustainability impacts of different governance mechanisms. The lessons will feed into a roadmap for the provision of forest ecosystem service bundles and a broad range of dissemination and communication activities. Ultimately, this will lead to better policy coordination, improved well-being of EU citizens and the ecological integrity of forest ecosystems.

Launched in November 2017 and lasting 36 months, InnoForESt brings together 16 partners from 9 EU countries.

This project has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation programme under grant agreement No 728061.
COUPLED

COUPLED is a four-year European training network. Led by Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, a group of researchers have come together to develop this European training network around the theme of land use and the interconnected (“coupled”) ways in which actions taken in one location contribute to land use change elsewhere.

A core element of this network is to integrate research, innovation and social responsibility in a better way. COUPLED builds on a strong interdisciplinary network to create a novel telecoupling concept that can support sustainable governance of land systems and related supply chains under global change. Telecoupling is a way to study human and natural systems that are connected over long distances.

The network will finance Early Stage Researchers (PhD students) to work on specific topics and case studies linked to the topic of land use and the factors that affect it in a changing and increasingly interconnected world. Recruitment for 15 Early Stage Researchers began in the autumn of 2017 and these will be selected in 2018 to join the three-year training network, ideally starting their projects in July 2018 when they will come together for the first time at the COUPLED Summer School.

ELO is one of the eight partner organisations that will host PhD students for secondments over the course of their three-year programmes. The PhD student at ELO will study is “Environmental impact assessments in a telecoupled world”. The Early Stage Researcher will evaluate how environmental impacts of products and services in globalized commodity networks affect land use and how they are accounted for in current environmental impact assessment methods, taking into account the trade-offs between different sustainability indicators. The researcher will then develop new approaches to evaluate the impact of locally made products and services versus those made far away from where they are used in terms of sustainability. The researcher will then test these assessment methods on particular products and services.

This project receives funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation programme under Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No. 765408.
Towards the end of 2017, ELO welcomed the news that the submission for the UNISECO project was successful. UNISECO (Understanding and improving the sustainability of agro-ecological farming systems in the EU) is a new project that is scheduled to be awarded under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Framework Programme. It will be launched officially in May 2018 with a kick-off meeting in Braunschweig, Germany.

The overall objective of the UNISECO project will be to promote the uptake of agro-ecological farming approaches in Europe. The project will do this by creating knowledge about the settings and circumstances in which particular agro-ecological farming systems are suitable for increasing productivity, the provision of public goods, and employment. Farm-level assessments by means of case studies will be a core part of identifying and assessing barriers to the uptake of agro-ecological farming systems. These will consider all manner of potential barriers, including institutional, technical, procedural, gender, and communications issues. An interactive online hub will be a key output from the UNISECO project, which will allow stakeholders to consider different trade-offs and strategies for balancing socio-economic, environmental and market-related drivers.

ELO will be involved primarily in three main work packages: translating research into recommendations for policymakers, facilitating stakeholder engagement in Multi-Actor Platforms, and dissemination.

This project receives funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation programme under Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No. 773901.
Wildlife Estates was set up 12 years ago with the mission to promote and guide the incredible efforts of landowners and land managers, across Europe. This initiative is based on a voluntary approach to highlight the role of land managers in protecting biodiversity. It hopes to bridge the gap between public authorities and those working mostly closely with land and to make them more visible to society as strong guardians of nature.

ELO’s flagship wildlife conservation project has grown from humble beginnings to becoming the largest private wildlife conservation label in Europe. Today, the Wildlife Estates network consists of over 280 estates and more than 1.5 million hectares, and the project is growing steadily.

The project is managed by 19 national delegations who are responsible for spreading the initiative at the country level.

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On the 19th – 21st September, land managers, WE members, and wildlife management experts from across Europe gathered in Bucharest, Romania for the 12th Plenary Session of the WE Label Steering Committee to exchange experiences and to strengthen the network. This was the first Plenary session held in an Eastern European Member State signals its increased commitment to eastern stakeholders in implementing sustainable biodiversity and land management practices. And the start of a new chapter for Wildlife Estates in Romania.

The Plenary Session included a public conference exploring the synergies between land management and forest management in wildlife conservation. The event garnered considerable media attention. It was attended by the Romanian Minister for Agriculture who gave his endorsement for the objectives and values of Wildlife Estates.

Speakers at the event included representatives from the world of industry, academia, as well as local and European policy-makers. The conference highlighted the importance of private land managers in nature conservation.

The label, led by the incredible efforts of its national delegations, is set to reach 2 million hectares in the next 2 years. It is currently the largest privately-owned conservation network in Europe.

WE estates is look forward to the 2018 Plenary Session in Lower Saxony and to celebrate the impressive advances made by our Germans partners and members. We welcome members and non-members alike to come and join our events.

For more information visit www.wildlife-estates.eu and subscribe to the WE Newsletter!
Pollinator Network initiative

The Pollinator Network initiative, commonly known as the PNi, is a network of farmers and land managers who are committed to ensuring a rich biodiversity on their territories.

The project was created in 2010 by the ELO and FCS, in partnership with Syngenta, in order to halt the loss and reverse the decline of biodiversity by encouraging the creation of habitats for pollinating insects.

Field margins have the potential to provide multiple benefits for the both the agri-businesses and the environment. Different field margin designs, including the establishing grass strips, beetle banks, sowing wildflower mixes for insects or introducing sources of seed for farm birds, result in different environmental enhancement and resource protection outcomes.

Benefits to the land owner include an increase in soil quality due to increased earthworm population and activity, improvement in the efficiency of water use by crops, decreased risk of flooding by slowing down the transfer of precipitation to surface water, decreased soil loss, preventing aquatic environment contamination by sediment from adjacent fields as well as increasing the resilience of agro-ecological systems to climate change. Research shows that if pollination is managed well on small diverse farms, with all other factors being equal, crop yields can increase by a significant median of 24 percent.

The ELO, together with Wildlife Estates, has continued its efforts to raise awareness about the benefits of multifunctional field margins for farm biodiversity. It has been working closely with partners in Spain where several landowners have received agronomic advice and facilitated access to targeted seed mixtures. So far, this year two additional Wildlife Estates have successfully implemented the desired measures and are already seeing the benefits, while two more Estates are in the process of adapting their agricultural lands to better retain biodiversity and to offer natural protection for areas beyond the margins.

In 2017, targeted questions on biodiversity-friendly farming measures, and specifically the use of pollinator-friendly field margins and beetle banks, have been included in the WE questionnaire in order to evaluate each candidate estates’ contribution to farm biodiversity. Wildlife Estates is working with its National Delegations to adapt the assessment methodologies of the project in order to be able to gather more robust quantitative data on prevalence of these type of biodiversity measures.

For more information visit http://www.europeanlandowners.org/projects/pollinators-network-initiative-pni
Land Is For Ever
Starting date: 1 April 2018

Adapting new conservation tools to engage private landowners in national and regional conservation efforts in EU Member States

In order to achieve the overall targets of the EU biodiversity policy, more robust efforts will be needed to support conservation of privately owned lands, which represent a large share of the Natura 2000 network. Meeting the EU biodiversity targets through private land conservation activities will have many co-benefits, most notably, climate change mitigation and adaptation benefits. Private conservation approaches should also complement public sector investments in conservation.

The use of innovative tools aimed at promoting private land conservation (e.g. through safe harbour agreements, covenants, conservation easements, private protected areas, fiscal benefits, land swaps, etc.) has great potential to accomplish these objectives (recent studies carried out for the European Commission, and examples of private land conservation in countries like the USA and Canada have demonstrated such success). These could represent an important complement to regulatory or direct compensation approaches in the EU.

However, these tools are used to a varying extent in the EU Member States, are very heterogeneous, and generally poorly known or understood. This project aims to contribute significantly to private landowners’ knowledge of these tools, as well as to the development and expansion of these tools in the EU. Each stage of the project aims to involve private landowners in order to create credibility, relevance, and legitimacy for innovative land conservation tools that are relevant in the cultural, political and legal landscape of their country.

ELO will work together with The Nature Conservancy, Agentschap voor Natuur en Bos, and our local member organisations to implement this project.
e-Natura2000.edu
Starting date: 1 April 2018
Supporting e-learning and open education for Natura 2000 managers

This project will explore the potential of building new approaches and methods to improve knowledge and capacity amongst Natura 2000 site managers in both public and private land, across the EU. New ways of accessing information, learning and connecting to peers need to be made available, and the cost and the environmental sustainability of traditional training should be addressed. The project will look at both the information and skills required (what a manager needs to know) and the competencies expected (how a Natura 2000 manager executes their tasks).

First, the project will examine the competencies needed by a range of actors to manage Natura 2000 sites more effectively. Then, fundamentally, the preparatory action gives the opportunity to test innovative tools and ways of delivering capacity building for those involved in the management of Natura 2000 sites. A sample cohort of participants will be selected to test the tools, providing examples of the types of issues facing Natura 2000 site managers in different Member States.

A focus will be put on developing tools that could be rolled out to reach the widest possible audience, including private land managers. These tools will make use of innovative approaches, including blended learning and digital technologies. In addition, the project team will create accessible events through a virtual twinning hub, as well as summer schools to generate a wider peer-to-peer learning initiative.

The project will also build on the experience of a range of existing EU and national communication initiatives, via the networks of the project partners, in order to reach the widest possible audience and the opportunity to make use of new technology for accessible capacity building experiences.

Local ELO membership organisations will be included (twinning) in function of the topics discussed.
The EU platform on coexistence between humans and large carnivores was established in 2014 with the vision, “To promote ways and means to minimize, and wherever possible find solutions to, conflicts between human interests and the presence of large carnivore species, by exchanging knowledge and by working together in an open-ended, constructive and mutually respectful way.” At the same time, a list of actions representing best practices for large carnivore management and conservation for the different European populations was identified in the document “Key Actions for large carnivore populations in Europe”.

The EU platform represents an excellent means for sharing views and issues at a higher level, but somehow lacks the direct contact with local issues. Pilot activities need to be implemented that can serve as models for other contexts and show how and where the participatory approach offers an effective means to move large carnivore conservation from the purely ecological to the social dimension, thus taking full account of the perceptions, emotions, and values of the local communities, and launching a shared responsibility process whereby actions that are implemented are selected on a common basis.

Therefore, the primary aim of this project is to set up local platforms of stakeholders in contentious areas in order to promote dialogue among different interest groups.

3 regional platforms will be supported:
- Romania, concentrating on a county where a significant proportion of the bear population lives and where there are reported conflicts;
- Spain, with a focus on Castilla y Leon and the increasing conflicts with wolves there;
- Italy, focusing on Trento and neighbouring regions because of the increasing conflicts associated with bears and the recent arrival of wolves.

ELO member organisations will be involved in each of the selected regions.
To acknowledge innovative & practical ideas to protect pollinators in European farming, the European Bee Award, rewards projects in the categories “Land Management practices” and “Innovative technological solutions”.

90% of bee species worldwide are solitary bees and they provide essential pollination services. The jury of the European Bee Award, chaired by Professor Charles GODFRAY, has put the spotlight on solitary bees, by selecting among the many contributions “A bee project for solitary bees”, an initiative to protect wild pollinators in Sibelco quarries. The quarries form very diverse landscapes, attracting solitary bees looking to nest in dry siliceous habitats on south-facing slopes. Raising awareness about bee diversity within the company is a priority for the project, that also puts a focus on recognising and creating good habitats for bees, and how to maintain them, by providing guidelines on flowering, nesting and monitoring.

The novel technological solution “DroplegUL” allows under-flower application in order to avoid deposition of crop protection on rapeseed flowers, one of the most important flowering agricultural crops for bees in Europe. The jury of the European Bee Award appreciated the scalability of the device, that has already been tested in other flowering crops, as well as the fact that almost all boom sprayers can be equipped with it.

This year, the jury of the European Bee Award has decided to bestow special recognition to a very unique contributor to the protection of pollinators and wildlife. Marek NOWAKOWSKI is an individual who has set himself the goal of “turning environmental science into practice”. His expertise, skills and enthusiasm mean that he has made one of the single biggest contributions to farmland wildlife by a private individual.
Land and Soil Management Award

This award encourages new concepts of land and soil protection and their implementation in land management, and it also serves to enhance awareness about the importance of land and soil functions.

For the past 10 years, the ELO, under the auspices of the European Commission (DG Environment and the Joint Research Centre), in association with the BOKU and Ljubljana Universities and Syngenta International, have granted the “Land and Soil Management Award”. This year, we would like to warmly thank Professor Winfred BLUM for the great collaboration and we would like to welcome Martin GERZABEK as the new President of the Jury.

In 2017 the award was bestowed on the food retailer SPAR, WWF Austria and 59 Austrian Farmers for their winning project entitled “Healthy Soil for Healthy Food”.

The project’s main objective is to provide healthy food from healthy soil to local consumers by using soil conservation methods. The project started in 2015, introducing soil-conservation agriculture practices on 800 hectares with the goal to expand it to 1,200 hectares in 2017. The group of the 59 farmers and their families produce mainly vegetables using fertilization with compost rather than chemical fertilizers, minimum tillage, permanent green cover and crop rotation.

One of the biggest food retailers in Austria, SPAR coordinates the project by guaranteeing the sale of the produced vegetables and paying a bonus of 30€ per stored ton of CO2 in soil to the farmers. The supermarket chain, in cooperation with independent soil experts, uses soil samples to monitor the process made in soil health and carbon storage to ensure the effectiveness of the project. Moreover, the produced vegetables are sold in more than 1,600 stores all over Austria.

The other partner, WWF Austria, functions as a provider of expertise and knowledge regarding soil issues and with thousands of supporters and a strong position in the civil society, WWF is using its communication channels to build awareness for the topic of soil degradation.

Altogether, the farmers, the retailer and the NGO have built a strong and unique alliance along the supply chain and this partnership enhances sustainable development, creating a better food chain from producer to consumer.

Don’t forget to send you application in 2018:

www.europeanlandowners.org/awards/soil-land-award

Julianna NAGY, Thierry de l’ESCAILLE, Daniel CALLEJA CRESPO, Julia HASLINGER, Alois LIEBMANN, Thomas PANZL, Andreas PREGARTNER, Erik FYRWALD, Martin GERZABEK, Emmanuelle MIKOSZ
The Belleuropa project was created by Giuseppe NATTA, a leading environmental figure and son of Nobel laureate Giulio NATTA. The award recognizes the exceptional initiatives undertaken by private land-managers and public-private partnerships in the protecting and conserving local landscapes and wildlife. It promotes sustainable business models based on responsible agriculture, rural tourism, and the promotion of low-impact products or activities.

This year the winning candidate was De Hoge Veluwe National Park which epitomizes the values and philosophy behind the Belleuropa project.

The park covers 5,400 hectares and boasts a spectacular mosaic of pre-industrial, man-made landscapes including heath, drifting sands, extensive wetlands as well as old-growth woodland. It is home to an extraordinarily diverse range of flora and fauna.

Due to its central position in the Netherlands De Hoge Veluwe National Park plays a key role in the country’s National Ecological Network and is also part of the European Natura 2000 Network. The careful and systematic management of the land has created a diversity of biotopes which act as a sanctuary for many protected and rare species (for example the Marsh Gentian, Pine Marten and Sand Sedge). For several of these species the Park is the last refuge in the Netherlands.

The award was presented to Seger VAN VOORST TOT VOORST, Director of the De Hoge Veluwe National Park Foundation, by MEP, Annie SCHREIJER-PIERIK, and Justine BENGOUGH of Neorurale, the family-run company which sponsors the Belleuropa Prize.

For more information on the Belleuropa Award or to become a member of Wildlife Estates, contact wildlife@elo.org
With the passionate support of its followers, the lime tree of Vi Payis (‘Old Country’) in Bioul, Wallonia, won the contest and was crowned with the title “Belgian Tree of the Year” in a ceremony hosted by the County Mayor.

The lime tree of Vi Payis is the largest small-leaved lime tree in the country and one of the most outstanding trees in Wallonia. The several roles and distinctions that have been attributed to it have died out over time. However, the fact that this tree has resisted all assaults and threats can only be understood as a collective desire to preserve it as a symbol or parcel of memory. It continues to be the subject of attention and admiration by the population.

In 2017 the contest was organized in Wallonia by the Walloon Foundation for Habitat Conservation, ELO, SRFB and FRW with the support of the Baillet-Latour Fund for the Environment.

In 2018, the Belgian Tree of the Year contest will be held in Flanders.
The Forum for the Future of Agriculture held a meeting in January 2017 in Reims, France with agricultural experts, stakeholders, and decision makers to discuss the question “Can France remain a global agricultural player?”

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss global competitiveness, the future of the CAP, and the integration of the circular economy in agricultural processes. Food and environmental security are central to our survival and one cannot be achieved without the other. Participants agreed that even if discussions in Brussels are vital, the essential initiatives can only take place locally and are needed in all regions of Europe. These will create the changes that are needed, and it is local stakeholders who are the ones who must drive progress in the countryside.

“Mission Innovation 2025” was given as an example to bring new ideas into French agriculture. Consisting of 30 innovative projects, the report develops three priorities for a new agricultural revolution: to develop a systematic approach to combating climate change through agriculture, to look at new technologies and tools for agriculture, and to empower different stakeholders to generate experimental research that can develop Europe’s competitive edge.

All agreed that the agriculture of tomorrow needs not just innovation, flexibility, and a new CAP, but mainly a renewed commitment from Europe, its land managers and the general public.
European Tree of the Year

More than 200 people attended the 2017 European Tree of the Year Ceremony at the European Parliament. Organized annually at European level since 2011, the European Tree of the Year is a contest that highlights the significance of trees in the natural and cultural heritage of Europe, and the importance of the ecosystem services that trees provide. The contest is not looking for the most beautiful tree, but for a tree with a story; a tree rooted in the lives and work of the people and the community that surround it.

This year’s winner was Polish Oak Józef, crowned 2017 European Tree of the Year with more than 17,000 votes, followed by Welsh Brimmon Oak, and the Czech Lime Tree at Lipka.

Oak Józef gave shelter to two Jewish brothers during World War II, who used its hollow trunk as a hideout. The oak’s image was also printed on the Polish 100 złoty bill in the 1930s. Oak Józef receives many visitors and it is likely that it will receive many more now that it has been crowned European Tree of the Year. Robert Godek, Head of the Strzyżów District Council, Poland, received the unique wood-

en trophy that passes from winner to winner on behalf of Oak Józef.

During the month of February, everyone can choose their favourite trees by voting online at www.treeoftheyear.org. Every year, winners are celebrated in Brussels, in a cultural and festive evening bringing together tree lovers, decision-makers, environmentalists, landowners, and national organizers. In 2017, Karmenu VELLA, European Commissioner for Environment, renewed his support and offered his patronage to the Award Ceremony. Ladislav MIKO and Natalie PAUWELS moderated the ceremony for the second time. Daniel CALLEJA-CRESPO, Director General for Environment at the European Commission addressed participants and said, “The European Tree of the Year initiative has an important role to play in showcasing Europe’s wonderful diversity and fostering shared values among European citizens. Every year, thousands of Europeans take part, demonstrating their common connection to the natural environment.”

www.treeoftheyear.org
@Treeoftheyear
Facebook: Tree of the Year
Instagram: treeoftheyear
The conference was divided into three parts. The first part was chaired by Louise Baker from the UN-CCD, and it was on “New Trends and Opportunities in Agriculture and Biodiversity”.

The second part was organised by the RISE Foundation and was chaired by Janez POTOČNIK, the RISE Foundation chairman. RISE launched its new report “CAP: thinking out of the box – Further modernisation of the CAP – why, what and how?” during this session. The report was in reaction to growing EU budgetary pressures and the entrenched debate on the future of the Common Agricultural Policy. RISE invited a small group of experienced CAP analysts to reflect upon what a future CAP could look like in terms of land management, risk management, and how procedural changes in Brussels could support successful and balanced reform. The report was produced to bring their reflections together. The full copy of the report is available at http://www.risefoundation.eu/publications.

At the end of the conference, the delegates had the chance to discuss new technologies for farmers, and food safety and security in 2050, which was introduced by the keynote speech by Ladislav MIKO, Deputy Director General for Food Safety from the European Commission, in the speech entitled “Food safety along with food security – can it be taken for granted in the future?”.

The day ended with a evening reception for the participants, where they could continue with the discussion.

For 2018, the ELO and the RISE Foundation will also share the organisation of the pre-FFA, and the topics that are up for discussion are “Initial thinking on the optimal scale and balance of livestock in the EU”, and the daily problems of an EU Farmer, focusing on the environmental requirements and how to adapt today’s business to future challenges.
Over the years, the FFA has remained true to these ideas and grown from 200 participants in the early days to over 1,600 at this year’s event. As attendance has grown, so has its scope, now looking beyond the borders of Europe to achieve a truly global outlook. In 2017, the FFA addressed the circular economy, the influence of the SDGs on global policy-making, as well as ensuring that the whole food chain is part of the transition towards sustainability.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide “a compelling vision with ambitious goals”, said FFA 2017 keynote speaker Kofi Annan, former UN Secretary General and Nobel Laureate. To achieve them, every government must play a critical role, as must all sectors of society and the business community. The FFA was once again the premier event on the Brussels’ environment and agricultural calendar, dedicating itself to its core mission of combining food and environmental security.

For the first time, the FFA hosted best practice examples: three excellent speakers from the Netherlands, Brazil and Zimbabwe who showed FFA guests what they are doing in the field to make change happen. Precision agriculture, large-scale organic farming, and landscape regeneration in desert areas were all championed, and showed how some of the changes that are needed are being addressed now.

The 11th Forum for the Future of Agriculture will take place on 27th March, 2018. It will focus on healthy farming, healthy food, and a healthy future, and how these can come together to achieve food and environmental security.
ELO General Assembly in Tallinn

The ELO General Assembly was held in Estonia in June 2017, where Pierre-Olivier DRÈGE was unanimously elected as President. DRÈGE is a French national and an engineer by training. The General Assembly took the opportunity to thank Christoph BÜREN, the outgoing President, for all the hard work, time and knowledge he has dedicated to the organisation over the years. Mr. BÜREN was named Honorary President of ELO.

Following this, Thierry de l’ESCAILLE, ELO Secretary General, presented the scheduled of ELO activities for the coming six months. His presentation ranged from the implications of Brexit, to CAP reform, and the consequences of the Russian embargo on the Baltic States. He concluded with a presentation of the Action Plan for Nature, People and the Economy, and a discussion on how the ELO’s Wildlife Estates Label project could be promoted as a means of achieving its targets.

The second part of the Assembly was a debate with the representatives of the Estonian authorities. Tarmo TAMM, Minister of Rural Affairs, began with a presentation broadly outlining the program of the Estonian Presidency, and discussed with ELO delegates on topics such as food supply chain, soil health and access to products such as glyphosate, organic farming, and the omnibus regulation. Keeping in mind the progress Estonia has made with digital technologies in various sectors, issues such as access to data and data protection were also raised with Marku LAMP, Deputy Secretary General of the Ministry of Environment.

The General Assembly thanked Mikk LINK, Chairman of the Board of the Estonian Private Forest Union and Ando EELMAA, member of the Board, for their support in organizing the Assembly. The meeting closed with a gala dinner, with a keynote speech by Joakim HELENIUS, owner of the Trigon Dairy Farm. The Wildlife Estates label was presented to two new Estonian territories: the Irjas and Korkare estates.
ELO General Assembly in Sofia

At the end of November 2017, the ELO was warmly welcomed by its members the Bulgarian Association of Agricultural Landowners (BAALO) and the National Association “Bulgarian Black Sea”, to the snowy capital of Sofia.

As expected, the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) was high on the agenda for all ELO members, with the European Commission’s Communication on the CAP reform coming out during the second day of the event. While ELO members did see strong opportunities in a CAP that would be more closely aligned to national priorities, they also expressed their concern that a renationalised policy could lead to a loss of common European interests.

ELO policy advisers also gave specific presentations on the upcoming review of the EU Forestry Strategy and its possible impact on forestry enterprises. The national members were also happy to hear about the five-year renewal for glyphosate, news of which came through during the GA itself.

With the European Commission’s recent launch of a string of infringement procedures against EU Member States regarding restrictions on the sale and purchase of agricultural land, the ELO was happy to host Thomas WIEDMANN of DG FISMA to give an overview of their recent Interpretative Communication on Foreign Investment in Farmland and EU Law. He once again confirmed the EC’s position that ‘land grabbing’ does not take place in Europe.

In the afternoon, Vice Minister of Agriculture for Bulgaria, Verginiya KRASTEVA, joined the General Assembly to discuss the priorities of the upcoming Bulgarian Presidency for agriculture.

Apart from the policy issues raised during the General Assembly, the ELO was proud to host Bulgarian farmers, foresters and land managers for the traditional gala dinner, where members had the chance to sample some of the country’s excellent wines.
All speakers agreed that a growing global population and a changing climate, combined with continued pressure on the environment, calls for increased food production using more sustainable methods. The SDGs and the Paris Agreement are certainly a great step forward in the framework of achieving sustainable development, and they need to be supported seriously, even though they may be quite complex and highly ambitious. The world is changing and we need to have new solutions to address these challenges.

Some underlined that the CAP status quo is unacceptable and how important it is to think outside the box, especially to guarantee fair income support for farmers, and to bolster environmental protection and climate action. Rural jobs have to be attractive, ensuring that the next generation will be willing to take over the farms and land management activities.

Participants agreed that climate change is already affecting agriculture and food security. We need to produce more and better, reconciling the productivity of soils and plants with sophisticated technology and high health standards, and with minimal ecological footprint. Farmers, foresters and land managers are aware of their responsibilities and they need a support system structured around the concept of land management for food and environmental security that focuses on objectives rather than being driven by pure compliance considerations that are often too bureaucratic.
Hosted by Annie SCHREIJER-PIERIK, MEP and Secretary General of the Inter-group “Biodiversity, Hunting and Countryside”, this year marked yet another successful event as approximately 150 guests gathered to hear about the timely and urgent question of a new strategy for the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) outlined in the European Commission’s Communication “The Future of Food and Farming”, published on the 29th November, 2017. Pierre-Olivier DRÈGE, ELO President, welcomed the EC Communication and highlighted that land-based measures are pivotal to achieving the environmental and climate related goals of the EU. Pierre BASCOU, from the Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development, acknowledged the role of private actors in helping to implement the EC Communication because they manage 75% of farming and forestry land in the EU, and raised the alarm on the state of biodiversity.

This warning was shared by Claudia OLAZABAL, Head of Unit of Directorate-General for Environment, and Andreas BAUMULLER, Head of Natural Resources at WWF European Policy Office, who pointed to the decline of flora and fauna, and the deterioration of water and soils. Pierre BASCOU explained that the new EC Communication aims to significantly improve the level of ambition. Under this new model, basic policy parameters and key objectives would be set at EU level, and implemented by Member States according to a policy plan approved by the European Commission. The new framework should ensure basic requirements for harmonization and minimum performance levels, while being more adapted to providing local services. On this point, numerous voices were raised to warn against increased diversion, and pointed to the necessity of having strong enforcement mechanisms. To summarise, Allan BUCKWELL explained that a clear signal needed to be sent to land managers to improve their impact on soils, cultural landscapes, and biodiversity. Additional support should also be given to innovation and research, because farmers can benefit from this type of knowledge. Finally, Annie SCHREIJER-PIERIK concluded that the new CAP should set ambitious goals regarding environmental care, climate action, and the delivery of ecosystem services.
COMMUNICATION
CountrySide Magazine

Published bimonthly for over 18 years, the CountrySide Magazine remains the voice of land managers and rural entrepreneurs, promoting new ideas and providing a platform for different voices.

The ELO believes that the voice of land managers and rural entrepreneurs should be taken into account in every process of decision taking. The CountrySide Magazine exists not only to provide such a voice, but also to connect stakeholders in agriculture and environment.

The magazine provides a platform for policy developments and ideas, gives updates on European events and makes space for those both inside and outside the ELO community. Its readership includes policy makers, academics, ELO members and all others with an interest in the European and global countryside. The CountrySide helps build bridges and create new ideas so that its broad readership can better come to grips with agriculture and environment at the global, European, national and local level.

More than 15,000 readers in EU and beyond receive the CountrySide Magazine. They include members of the EU institutions, land managers, academics, as well as decision takers in all EU capitals.

Edited every two months in English and French, with a German and Spanish 4 page abstract, the paper version is composed of 16 pages.

✉️ countryside@elo.org
Find all the past issues at the ELO website
The ELO Online: follow us!

The ELO website: is our digital window to the world, and acts as one of the main communication tools for the organisation. It is refreshed with information, conference invitations, ELO projects and other worthwhile material www.elo.org

The ELO on Social Media: ELO continues to put an emphasis on its social media communication. It is also the quickest tool to get in touch with our office, ask questions and receive direct event updates. We link news, serve up photographs, discuss our policies and keep you informed – all at your fingertips!

@EUlandownersOrg > +2300 followers
+4400 tweets
Follow us to be part of a buzzing discussion on topics related to agriculture, environment, and innovation from Brussels. Check #EloEvents to follow the ELO conferences live on twitter

Europeanlandowners
Check the latest publications, projects, event pictures and keep in touch with the ELO team

ELO Mailing list
Join our mailing list to receive invitations to ELO events, conferences and activities: http://www.europeanlandowners.org/newsletter

Exclusive for ELO members:

The ELO Members Newsletter: is sent out to all ELO members through our members-only intranet on weekly basis. It contains all the latest developments in the European Union, upcoming events in Brussels as well as new projects and policy developments. The ELO newsletter is part of the comprehensive news and information services to our membership.

The ELO intranet: For ELO members, the ELO website also serves as the access point to its secure intranet, where a wide range of documentation, photo’s, videos and information about our events is available.
Wild Boar (sus scrofa) population in Europe:
A scientific review of population size and distribution, key environmental factors, causes, impacts, and implications for management

Over the past 30 years, the population of wild boar in Europe has systematically increased in size and in its distribution range. The species has reappeared in areas of Europe where it had previously been hunted to extinction. The wild boar is now one of the widest ranging mammals in the world and these growing wild boar populations are posing both environmental and economic challenges to rural stakeholders.

In the ELO’s publication "Wild Boar (sus scrofa) population in Europe: A scientific review of population size and distribution, key environmental factors, causes, impacts, and implications for management" we explore existing research to date on the demographic changes in wild boar population across Europe.

This paper aims to assess the scientific evidence for this population growth. It explores the myriad possible causes, as well as documenting some of the effects of growing populations.

Based on the existing knowledge accumulated in peer-reviewed scientific papers from the past 30 years, the paper also offers some policy recommendations aimed to decrease the number of negative human-wild boar interactions.

The study will be presented on the 26 June 2018 in Brussels at a public conference hosted by the European Parliament’s Intergroup for Biodiversity, Hunting, Countryside.

If you are interested in attending this Intergroup meeting please inform the ELO Intergroup secretariat (delphine.dupeux@elo.org).

To read the paper, visit our website: www.elo.org (available from 26 June 2018)
COOPERATION WITH THE EU INSTITUTIONS
The Intergroup is unique as it provides a platform through which the managers of EU land and politicians can exchange views and communicate on future challenges. It is an important vehicle to prevent and resolve possible conflicts between stakeholders who are usually operating separately and not communicating with each other (farmers, green NGOs but also users). It is also an opportunity to relay key figures and data on the economic and social value of EU land and rural areas that are difficult to collect and are not that often publicised.

In 2017, the European Landowners’ Organization (ELO) addressed several key issues with the support of the President of the Intergroup the MEP Karl-Heinz FLORENZ and the Board members of the Intergroup. These were debated during special events organised in the European Parliament which gathered in total more than 1,000 participants throughout the year. The first event in January was particularly successful as it addressed the future evolution of the CAP under the banner of ‘CAP - Thinking out of the Box’ where the RISE Foundation paper on the agricultural reforms were presented by the RISE Chairman and former Commissioner Janez POTOČNIK and the project’s Task Force - eminent agro-economists Professor Emeritus Allan BUCKWELL, Professor Emeritus Alan MATTHEWS, Dr David BALDOCK and Professor Erik MATHIJJS.

Other events focused on policy items such as the access to and use of farmland in Europe, the value of private land conservation as well as looking ahead to the new EU forestry strategy. The Intergroup also hosted an international exchange of view on sustainable wildlife management of wildlife in Africa at the beginning of 2018.

In 2018, the Intergroup will continue to focus on the wide and varied range of interests and policy that affect the countryside and rural communities.
The EU Platform on Coexistence between People and Large Carnivores is a grouping of organisations representing different interests groups which have agreed a joint mission: «To promote ways and means to minimize, and wherever possible find solutions to, conflicts between human interests and the presence of large carnivore species, by exchanging knowledge and by working together in an open-ended, constructive and mutually respectful way»

The importance of the EU Platform for bringing together stakeholders on the EU level and its facilitating role at local, regional and national level was confirmed by its inclusion in the EU Action Plan on Nature, People and the Economy, adopted on 27 April 2017. The platform was specifically mentioned as being of high importance for engaging economic actors and stakeholders, promoting dialogue, exchanging experiences and knowledge and cooperating in addressing conflicts between people and protected species.

The EU Platform has met with success this year in agreeing common messages between EU level stakeholders representatives involved with large carnivore management, especially during the Plenary Session which took place in Brussels on the 1st of June. The ELO pursued its active involvement in the Platform through the presence of Jurgen TACK, scientific director of ELO who chaired the two regional workshops and our role as co-organiser next to EUROPARC federation for the event in Italy.

On the regional level, the Platform’s workshops in Romania and Italy have brought together a range of stakeholders, presented good practice and helped to reach agreement on specific areas of conflict surrounding large carnivores’ presence. Nonetheless, in order to bring decisions closer to the ground, the Commission is also planning to support the establishment of regional and local Platforms in areas where there are currently high conflict related to the presence of large carnivores.
To combat the negative impact IAS have on ecosystems, Member States are required to carry out a set of measures for these species which include restrictions (monitoring of distribution routes and strict controls on the introduction of species), early detection and rapid eradication of IAS where identified, exchange of information with other MS. The ongoing management of species that have already become widespread remains of course of utmost importance. IAS represent the second greatest cause of biodiversity loss worldwide and are estimated to cost the EU economy 12 billion euro each year.

On the 11th and 12th of October 2017, Humberto DELGADO ROSA and Myriam DUMORTIER from the European Commission’s DG Environment, and ELO delegates attended an event hosted by POLLENIZ, a regional public health body, known as an ‘Organisme à Vocation Sanitaire’, in the Pays de la Loire region of northwestern France.

The event took place over two days and focused on the challenges associated with IAS in the region notably on wetlands area and wet pastures. The delegates spent the first day in the field in order to get a sense of the scale of the IAS problem that the local producers, mainly extensive farmers are facing. This region acts as a gateway for international trade, and is home to a diverse range of species, making it an excellent case study. The second day, the conference entitled: “New health issues and the management of IAS” hosted at the Regional Council of Pays de la Loire, was chaired by the President of POLLENIZ, Serge GELOT, and Maurice PERRION, Vice-President of the Regional Council.

DG Environment representatives underlined the need for such local bodies having the ability to mobilize, coordinate and motivate volunteers, to solve problems and develop best practices in the field which could be used elsewhere. Polliniz will support the work of ELO within the new EC Working Group on IAS in 2018.
European Historic Houses on the road to the 2018 European Year of Cultural Heritage

The European Historic Houses Association (EHHA) represents the interest of its members on a wide variety of policies, including: VAT regulations, energy and environment, and illicit trafficking of cultural goods.

As a membership-based organisation, the EHHA also acts as a platform to exchange best practices between its national associations. The Association contributes to securing the future of historic houses and gardens in Europe through its NextGeneration group, made up of young and future owners of historic houses, which held its Annual Conference in Siena, Italy in March 2017. However, the biggest challenge for the year to come is the promotion of the 2018 European Year of Cultural Heritage (EYCH), which was endorsed in May 2017. The strategic plan of the European Historic Houses Association for the 2018 European Year of Cultural Heritage is well under way, since the Association has been collaborating with a dedicated Working Group. The EHHA is also taking part in the stakeholders’ group which was set up by the European Commission to help with designing its policies for the Year, under the umbrella of the Voices of Culture. During 2017, the European Historic Houses Association also collaborated with its partners from the Alliance 3.3, especially with Europa Nostra and the European Landowners’ Organization (ELO) to develop concrete actions for the EYCH. To that end, it will organise two major events at European level during the Year. First, the Private Heritage Week, with the motto ‘Our House, Your Heritage, which will be held from 24th to 27th May 2018 across Europe, in partnership with several other European associations. The Association will also organise a photography competition in the summer of 2018 to shed light on private owners’ contribution to Europe’s rich cultural heritage. To raise awareness, the European Historic Houses Association is setting up a comprehensive communication campaign at European level through social media channels and traditional media to actively promote the events of the Association, of its National Associations, and of its network as a whole, in order to create momentum around cultural heritage throughout the EYCH, and beyond.
Europa Nostra

Europa Nostra mobilised its members and partners in 2017 to actively contribute to the European Year of Cultural Heritage (EYCH) 2018, which was officially launched on 7th December in Milan. Europa Nostra was proud to be recognised by the European Commission as one of the key partners of the Year.

In 2017 Europa Nostra will continue to mobilise civil society and its wide network of members in preparation of the Year and for its first ever European Heritage Summit to take place in June 2018 in Berlin.

“One of the highlights of 2016 was Europa Nostra’s European Heritage Congress in Madrid for which more than 1,000 heritage stakeholders gathered in May. This major event is organised as part of the “Mainstreaming Heritage” project that is co-funded by the European Union. President Plácido DOMINGO personally welcomed the 30 laureates of the prestigious European Union Prize for Cultural Heritage / Europa Nostra Awards.

Under the “7 Most Endangered” programme that is jointly organised by Europa Nostra and the European Investment Bank Institute and supported by the EU, the 7 most endangered heritage sites 2016 were announced at a public event in Venice on 16 March 2016. In addition to these sites, the Venice lagoon was declared the most endangered heritage site in Europe.

Throughout the year, Europa Nostra continued to spread the message of heritage as a driver of sustainable development and the importance of safeguarding it across and beyond Europe, including high-ranking events in Equador, the UNESCO World Heritage Committee meeting and in the United Arab Emirates - clearly demonstrating that the voice of cultural heritage is needed and listened to, both in Europe and at a global level.

www.europanostra.org
Future for Religious Heritage

All over Europe, our shared culture of tangible and intangible religious heritage needs to be safeguarded for future generations to enjoy. FRH, an independent, non-faith, not-for-profit organization, continues its efforts to promote the protection and use of religious buildings and their contents. FRH works with its members to develop cross-border projects.

Future for Religious Heritage selected as Official Partner for the European Year of Cultural Heritage

The European Commission has designated 2018 as the European Year of Cultural Heritage, and Future for Religious Heritage has been selected, alongside 34 other cultural heritage organisations, to be an official partner. FRH is participating in the Commission’s stakeholder group ‘Voices of Culture and Heritage’ and is working with the European Commission to implement the years activities and events, utilising our expertise and network.

FRH Connect Project to run for 4 years

In May, FRH received confirmation that the European Commission would fund the project ‘FRH Connect’ for four years, allowing the network to expand its work to safeguard European religious heritage. This is a tremendous reward for the hard work undertaken by the Council, staff and members of the network, and is an encouraging sign that the Commission recognises the value and importance of religious heritage to Europe.

Religiana

As part of the FRH Connect funding, the Religiana web app is being redesigned and FRH is looking for more partners to update the site with more buildings. Religiana, which seeks to become the online reference for anyone looking to find information on European religious heritage sites, also benefited in 2017 from the addition of more than 80 heritage buildings from the Netherlands, and aims to increase the number of buildings online to 600 by the end of the first project year.

New Website

With the FRH website being one the busiest for a religious heritage network, we have taken the opportunity to build a new website to showcase our work in the more accessible and attractive way. Thanks to the hard work from the communications team, FRH has been able to launch the new website just before Christmas.

EuropeTour

The EuropeTour project aimed to identify skills gaps in European rural cultural tourism practitioners. FRH participated in the creation of modules to be used as resources for training schemes, with wisdom drawn from the FRH membership. This was refined and delivered at meetings held in Veliko Tarnovo (BG), Potes (SP) and Arcevia (IT).

Friends of FRH

FRH has continued to develop its circle of Friends – a source of volunteers and of funding - through presentations, events and mailings. It is set up by la Fondation Roi Baudouin, and managed by a volunteer. Looking ahead to 2018, the Friends will have the opportunity to meet more frequently, as a busy schedule of activities is planned in the first half of the year, including trips to Liège (BE), Suceava (RO) and Saint-Omer (FR).
European Heritage Alliance 3.3

In 2017, the European Heritage Alliance 3.3 – a platform of European and international networks and organisations active in the wider field of cultural heritage – focused on the preparation of the European Year of Cultural Heritage (EYCH) 2018.

18 Alliance members were selected by the European Commission to participate in the stakeholders group “Voices of Culture and Heritage” to assist with the implementation of the EYCH at EU level. Two plenary meetings of the Alliance were organised back to back with the stakeholders group’s meetings in order to allow the members to effectively contribute to the Year and to have a fruitful exchange of views with representatives from the EYCH task force.

The first Alliance meeting took place on 27 April in Brussels and coincided with the adoption of the Year by the European Parliament. The second meeting was held on 18 October in Brussels. Alliance members had their third meeting on 6 December in Milan on the occasion of the launch of the European Year of Cultural Heritage during the European Culture Forum. The Forum featured a session on cultural heritage and civil society with Alliance representatives. Paolo Fontani, Director of UNESCO Liaison Office in Brussels, presented UNESCO’s work to the Alliance. Alliance members also discussed their contribution to the European Cultural Heritage Summit 2018, which will be held in Berlin on 18-24 June and co-hosted by Europa Nostra in Berlin.

In 2017, 8 new members joined the Alliance, namely the European Historic Thermal Towns Association, the European Federation for Architectural Heritage Skills, Europeana, Perspektiv, the European Association of Archaeologists, Architects’ Council of Europe, Trans Europe Halles and Michael Culture Association. The Alliance now consists of 46 members.

Europa Nostra will continue to coordinate the European Heritage Alliance 3.3 under its Network project “Sharing Heritage - Sharing Values” (2017-2021), which maintains the support of the Creative Europe Programme of the European Union.
EPA develops projects with a focus on environmental protection, climate adaptation, sustainable energy, sustainable transport and circular economy strategies. EPA has a wide experience in stakeholder involvement and public participation, targeting different groups of citizens within national campaigns such as Tree of the Year, European Mobility Week, Bike to Work or Safe routes to schools. EPA also provides professional service-facilitation for urban planning, strategy development, public spaces, green-spaces and mobility issues.

On March 21st, International Day of Forests, the Award Ceremony of the European Tree of the Year took place at the European Parliament in Brussels, organized by EPA and ELO. Organized under the patronage of Karmenu VELLA, European Commissioner for the Environment, and hosted by MEPs Pavel POC and Bronis ROPE.

The annual get-together of the EPA members took place this year in the border city of Cieszyn in Poland, in November. The EPA team was received by representatives of the Euroregion Cieszyn Silesia. The event provided time for nice discussions around the common projects of EPA member foundations (trees, climate, water, mobility), exploring synergies for project preparation and funding, but also slots for team building and discovering the area.

EPA has coordinated LIFE+ operating grants activities, and has being a partner in 3 successful INTER-REG projects on sustainable mobility and 4 EuropeAid projects focused on the global consequences of Climate Change. EPA and it member foundations are open to cooperation in European and International projects, so do not hesitate to contact our headquarters at: pship@nap.cz

www.environmentalpartnership.org

Environmental Partnership Association
The members of the Coalition reiterated that the policy should help to maintain economically viable and competitive rural areas, preserve cultural landscapes and at the same time enhance the provision of ecosystem services. It must also be easy to apply and we must avoid increasing red tape for farmers, land managers, forest owners, hunters and other rural actors.

The Coalition is also active on the ENRD (European Network for Rural development), as part of the “producers cluster”, to follow the implementation of the RD policy, creating the momentum for the Cork 2.0 declaration and to make proposals for the EIP focus groups (AGRI), particularly the subgroup on innovation. The coalition also supports the work on the Natura 2000 Users Forum.

Members of the Coalition:

**COPA-COGECA**
European farmers and European agri-cooperatives

**CEJA**
European Council of Young Farmers

**ELO**
European Landowners’ Organization

**FACE**
The Federation of Associations for Hunting and Conservation of the EU

**UECBV**
The European Livestock and Meat Trades Union

**CEPF**
Confederation of European Forest Owners
Perspectives for 2018

Now that the CAP Communication has been launched, much time during 2018 will be taken up with figuring out the many details of the next reform. We look forward to working with the European institutions and other stakeholders to create policies that work best for those of us who manage the land. After all, if those that manage the land cannot understand the policies or lend their support to them, then there is little chance of real success.

We also look forward to more details of 2017’s Nature Action Plans, so that we can make sure that these too work in the field. We were very glad to be recognised as a full partner in these efforts, and will work to make sure that the guidance is better, more flexible, and that there is much more funding available to achieve the goals we set out.

To see the best results of such efforts, we need to look no further than our Wildlife Estates. With over 1,500,000 hectares of extraordinary European countryside covered by the Wildlife Estates Label, it is testament to the strong values and objectives of our land managers. We will continue to grow this project in the coming years, and continue to promote private conservation as the best possible tool to halt biodiversity loss and mitigate climate change.

2018 will also see the ECJ’s ruling on the future of new breeding techniques in Europe. We strongly believe that these should not be accounted for under the current GMO legal framework. They are fundamentally different tools that will help farmers deal with climate change, use less inputs, and create better outcomes for all.

Finally, the ELO is very proud to present the 11th anniversary edition of our Forum for the Future of Agriculture. In the space of ten years, it has clearly established itself as the premier event on the Brussels’ calendar for food and environment with 1,600 guests and speakers of global significance. This year, we will feature Queen Noor of Jordan, Commissioners Phil Hogan and Frans Timmermans, and three Michelin-star chef Massimo Bottura, who will discuss how we can achieve healthy farming, healthy food, and a healthy future. It is, as always, a warm pleasure to invite all readers to attend.
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<td>AKIS</td>
<td>Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems</td>
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<td>3E</td>
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<td>CAP</td>
<td>Common Agricultural Policy</td>
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<td>COO</td>
<td>Chief Operating Officer</td>
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<td>European Family Business</td>
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<td>Seventh Framework Program</td>
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<td>Future for Religious Heritage</td>
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<td>Green Infrastructure</td>
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<td>GPS</td>
<td>Global Positioning Satellite (system)</td>
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<td>IAS</td>
<td>Invasive Alien Species</td>
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<td>ICT</td>
<td>Information and Communication Technology</td>
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<td>LULUCF</td>
<td>Land Use, Land Use Change, and Forestry</td>
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<td>MAES</td>
<td>Mapping and Assessing Ecosystems and their Services</td>
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<td>MEP</td>
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<td>Non-Intervention Management</td>
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<td>Tree of the Year</td>
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<td>Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership</td>
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<td>Pollinator Network initiative</td>
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<td>Rural Investment Support for Europe</td>
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<td>United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change</td>
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<td>WE</td>
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<td>YFCS</td>
<td>Young Friends of the Countryside</td>
</tr>
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