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Confédération Européenne des Entrepreneurs de Travaux Techniques Agricoles, Ruraux et Forestiers
Europäischer Zentralverband der land- und forstwirtschaftlichen Lohnunternehmer und ländlichen Dienstleistungsunternehmer

CEETTAR POSITION PAPER

Supporting Precision Farming and Technology Use Under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)

Technology and its development, as well as the ability to implement better technology on a large enough scale to make a difference. We know that technology is one of the big points that will help the EU achieve its goals with climate, food and energy supply security.

That is why it is so important that good technology becomes available to everyone, and that the agriskills needed to make the best use of this technology also become available to everyone.

EU farmers should be incentivized to use precision technologies as services rather than focusing solely on purchasing them. Stimulating technology use ensures accessibility for farms of all sizes, promotes optimal technology application, and reduces environmental impact. Rural and agricultural contractors play a crucial role in delivering advanced technologies and skills to the agricultural sector, addressing environmental and economic challenges.

Relevance of the Approach

The agricultural sector faces significant challenges, including climate change, resource constraints, and the demand for sustainable farming practices. Addressing these challenges requires innovative solutions, such as precision farming technologies. However, the adoption of these technologies is hindered by high costs and rapid technological obsolescence. For many small and medium-sized farms, direct ownership of such equipment is financially unattainable, creating disparities in technological access across the agricultural sector.

Stimulating technology use through service-based models offers a viable alternative. This approach allows farms of varying sizes to access cutting-edge technologies without prohibitive upfront investments. By focusing on service-based access, farms can ensure that technologies are used optimally and tailored to specific needs. Contractors and cooperatives are particularly well-suited to deploy such models, providing advanced tools like drones, camera sprayers, and precision slurry application systems in a cost-effective manner.

These service models also mitigate the risks associated with rapid technological advancements. For instance, rather than investing in machinery that may become

obsolete, farmers can benefit from continuous access to the latest innovations through contractors. Contractors, equipped with agronomic expertise, enhance the effective application of these technologies, making them accessible even for farms with limited personnel or technical know-how. This shift not only democratizes access to technology but also promotes sustainable farming practices by optimizing resource utilization and reducing environmental impacts.

Environmental and Economic Benefits

Precision farming technologies have demonstrated their potential to improve resource efficiency and environmental outcomes significantly. For example, enhancing slurry application methods can increase nitrogen efficiency by 10-20%, reducing dependency on artificial fertilizers and lowering CO2 emissions associated with their production. Each kilogram of nitrogen saved conserves approximately 8 cubic meters of natural gas, emphasizing the dual economic and environmental benefits.

Other advancements, such as variable rate application equipment and sensor-based tools, enable farmers to apply inputs precisely where they are needed. This reduces waste, supports biodiversity, and aligns with sustainable farming practices. The impact of these innovations is particularly notable in addressing EU climate goals, including reducing greenhouse gas emissions and preserving ecosystems.

Even incremental improvements in technology adoption can yield substantial benefits. For instance, adopting advanced data acquisition tools or decision-support systems can empower farmers to make data-driven decisions, improving yields while minimizing input costs. These technologies contribute directly to achieving the EU's green architecture goals under the CAP, which prioritize climate action, resource efficiency, and biodiversity preservation.

Role of Agricultural Contractors

Agricultural contractors are pivotal in bridging the technological gap in the EU farming sector. They provide tailored solutions to farms of all sizes, ensuring equitable access to advanced technologies. As key players in rural economies, contractors also contribute to regional development by creating jobs and fostering economic growth. Their ability to offer scalable and flexible solutions aligns closely with the objectives of the CAP.

In addition to supporting day-to-day farming operations, contractors play a crucial role in emergency response. During natural disasters such as floods, fires, or snow, contractors often provide vital support, leveraging their equipment and expertise to assist affected rural areas. By integrating advanced technologies into their services, contractors enhance their capacity to address both routine and extraordinary agricultural challenges.

Contractors also help overcome the demographic challenges faced by the agricultural sector. With an ageing farming population and limited new entrants, contractors provide essential services that reduce the reliance on farm-owned equipment. This model enables smaller farms to compete effectively, ensuring that technological advancements benefit the entire agricultural sector rather than being concentrated among larger enterprises.

Call to Action

To fully realize the potential of precision farming, the CAP should prioritize incentivizing technology use through contractors. This can be achieved by introducing targeted support measures such as subsidies, vouchers, or tax incentives that facilitate access to advanced technologies. For instance, a "smart technologies voucher" system could be implemented, allowing farmers to access contractor services at reduced costs. Such a system would lower financial barriers for small and medium-sized farms, promoting inclusivity and equity.

Skills development is another critical area of focus. Training initiatives should be supported to ensure that farmers and contractors possess the expertise needed to maximize the benefits of advanced technologies. These programs could include workshops, certification schemes, and collaborative projects that foster knowledge exchange between stakeholders.

The environmental benefits of precision farming must also be emphasized. Technologies that contribute to climate action, biodiversity preservation, and resource efficiency should be prioritized in CAP funding. By aligning financial incentives with sustainability goals, the CAP can drive widespread adoption of precision technologies, transforming EU agriculture into a more competitive, resilient, and environmentally conscious sector.

Leveraging Best Practices

Implementing a voucher system that subsidizes contractor-provided services ensures that all farms, regardless of size, can benefit from the latest technological advancements. By linking subsidies to the adoption of specific precision farming tools, such as DGPS systems, variable rate application equipment, and data analytics platforms, the CAP can drive innovation and sustainability across the sector.

Harmonizing support measures across Member States prevents market distortions and ensures a level playing field for all EU farmers. A standardized approach requires coordinated efforts to define eligible technologies, establish traceability standards, and create a comprehensive register of contractors.

By adopting these recommendations, the CAP can address both the environmental and economic challenges facing the agricultural sector. Supporting precision farming through service-based models not only aligns with EU sustainability goals but also empowers farmers to thrive in an increasingly competitive global market.

Conclusion

The agricultural sector stands at a crossroads, facing unprecedented challenges that demand innovative solutions. Precision farming technologies offer a pathway to sustainability, but their widespread adoption requires systemic changes in how they are accessed and applied. By incentivizing the use of these technologies through contractors, the CAP can ensure that farms of all sizes benefit from the latest advancements.

Agricultural contractors, equipped with cutting-edge tools and expertise, are uniquely positioned to deliver these solutions. Their role in promoting equity, efficiency, and sustainability underscores the need for targeted support measures. Through subsidies, training initiatives, and environmental incentives, the CAP can transform EU agriculture, making it more competitive, inclusive, and resilient. The time to act is now, leveraging the full potential of precision farming to build a sustainable future for European agriculture.

About CEETTAR:

The European Confederation of Agricultural, Rural and Forestry Contractors, established in 1961, represents about 150,000 companies and nearly 600,000 workers. It aims to represent the interests of land-based contractors in Europe. In 2014, the European Network of Forestry Entrepreneurs decided to merge with CEETTAR, resulting in a stronger and more representative single organisation representing land-based contractors at EU level.

CEETTAR aims to be a proactive force to benefit the contractors and the rural economy at European level. Its objective is to:

- Represent the national federations and defend their professional interests in relation to the institutions of the EU. This way, CEETTAR is recognised as representative organisation for contractors towards the European Institutions,
- Represent the national federations and defend their professional interests towards other private organisations, which are active at European level and beyond. CEETTAR maintains constructive relations with COPA-COGECA (farmers), CEMA (agricultural machinery industry), EFFAT (workers)…
- Help organisations in the new Member States to fulfil their national objectives as rapidly as possible and under the best conditions through the expertise transfer developed by the CAP 50 years ago.