

A platform again? No, a platform at last!

The Agriculture & Progress platform brings together agricultural producers and the first processing food industry to promote sustainable agricultural production. Its founding members, CIBE, CEFS and CEPM have joined forces to promote this sustainable approach to institutions in the beet-sugar-corn sectors and to communicate with civil society.

1. THE NEW AGRICULTURE & PROGRESS PLATFORM



**AGRICULTURE
& PROGRESS**

It is well known that the French are not gifted in languages, but they love English expressions. One of the latest to date: agri-bashing... These words say nothing and they say everything encompassing in the same condemnation livestock and field crops, irrigation, genetics and all veterinary, pharmaceutical or phyto-pharmaceutical medications. Since the beginning of time, agriculture and progress have been synonymous. Agriculture has never stagnated. Each era has seen its own agricultural revolution: clearing, selection, mechanization and treatment have accompanied the three successive phases of human nutrition: food self-sufficiency, food diversity and food security. Objectively, never before have our developed societies experienced such healthy, safe, good and cheap food with a steady decrease in the food budget as a proportion of overall household income. But nothing does. Nor the ability of agriculture to create jobs and export. Nor its major role in the protection of territories and biodiversity. Everything is subject to criticism.

Agricultural representation must change

Very early on, farmers were able to organize themselves. They formed trade unions, promoted agricultural sectors and contributed to the creation of the first Common Agricultural Policy. Strongly present in Brussels, occupying a prominent place in the European Commission's Directorate-General for Agriculture, agricultural unions have been active since the 2000s, witnessing the rise of consumer and environmentalist unions. Defending its economic interests in the face of the free trade agreement

of the World Trade Organisation, the agricultural world has clearly underestimated and even neglected the messages addressed to it by society, limiting itself to providing a defensive and technical response to its environmental aspirations. Not believing itself to be in agreement, it gradually became more radical. This radicalization has proliferated on fertile ground: doubt. The precautionary principle, which is certainly necessary, has emerged not as a protection for consumers, but as an antidote to the principle of innovation. From then on, science became suspicious.

And all questions related to plant treatment products are no longer addressed by the legislator from the point of view of science and risk, but from the point of view of precaution, suspicion and prohibition. Since then, all genetic innovations, all chemical molecules have appeared harmful. To claim that consumers have been manipulated would be inaccurate. It would be more appropriate to consider that they have been informed in one direction only. Social networks are the best example: farmers are not very present, at least not in an organized way.

Take the initiative, communicate and convince

The Agriculture & Progress platform is based on a two-fold observation: first, the need to take control of one's destiny. It is up to the agricultural world and the agri-food sectors to communicate directly with public opinion without any filter in a proactive logic by basing their convictions on facts. Secondly, moving from traditional to modern communication. Be able to mobilize local networks, gather petitions, and organize a territorial network using the enormous potential of the agricultural press. There are already agricultural platforms, but they are often technical associations or public relations networks. Initiated by European maize producers, beet growers and sugar manufacturers, the Agriculture & Progress platform aims to extend to all crops that wish to combine sustainable agriculture, respectful of the environment, health and open to scientific and technical progress. Let's act together!

2. A WORD FROM THE FOUNDING MEMBERS



Lobbying is action!

Marie-Christine Ribéra –
General Director of the
European Committee of Sugar
Manufacturers (CEFS)

How is our Agriculture & Progress platform innovative? There are already various platforms around the food chain in Brussels, but they either have a technical objective, namely the sharing of knowledge, or a public relations objective, such as networking.

Communication action becomes essential. The more complicated our files are, the simpler we have to make it, without ever caricaturing, but with stubborn pedagogy and personalization of messages. No one is better able than the farmer in his field or the manufacturer in his factory to show good practices in situ



Breaking clichés and avoiding caricatures

Elisabeth Lacoste –
Director of the International
Confederation of European Beet
Growers (CIBE)

Today, public opinion through Non-Governmental Organisations and Trade Unions have naturally been involved in European debates.

3. MEMORANDUM ON AGRICULTURE & PROGRESS AFTER THE 2019 EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS

Marie-Christine RIBERA, CEFS Director General for the platform predicts that the European policy renewal (new Parliament and new Commission) will have consequences for the Common Agricultural Policy and food legislation. The Agriculture & Progress platform will be an effective tool for engaging in a constructive - i.e. proactive and credible - debate with the chain of decision-makers in Brussels and in the capitals of the EU countries. The new European political context (new Parliament and Commission) will have consequences on the Common Agricultural Policy and food legislation. The Agriculture & Progress platform will be an effective tool for engaging in a constructive - i.e. proactive and credible - debate with the chain of decision-makers in Brussels and the capitals of EU Member States. The European agricultural community faces several challenges: producing enough for a growing population and in a sustainable way to address environmental problems,

The transition from a triangle of discussion (farmers, industry and the Commission) to a circle involving civil society, to which the European Parliament is clearly attached, has not been anticipated or mastered by our professions.

In this context, the Agriculture & Progress platform aims to bring objectivity back into debates, federate cultures around common arguments, balance the precautionary principle and the principle of innovation and contribute to the recognition of technological change as an asset for society as a whole.



Brussels is the relevant level to act

Céline Duroc –
General Director of the General
Association of Corn Producers
(AGPM) and Permanent Delegate
of CEPM, European Confederation
of Corn Producers

CEPM is based on the “project management” logic. We identify our priorities, seek partners, define with them an ad hoc strategy and bring together common human, technical and financial resources. This is exactly the concept of the Agriculture & Progress platform. But this is a multi-cultural sector because all agricultural production faces the need to combine competitiveness and sustainability.

In other words, it was important for us to create a vehicle that could, through concrete examples and constant pedagogical concern, respond to the questions and even concerns of civil society in order to constitute a point of balance in an often skit debate between NGOs and industries whose agricultural production is often held hostage.

facing climate change while ensuring competitiveness in a sector exposed to international markets and generating a decent income.

At the political, legislative and regulatory level in the EU, the agricultural sector is facing increasingly stringent rules under the Common Agricultural Policy on biofuels, soil protection and irrigation, carbon neutrality and biodiversity. On all these points, farmers and the first processing industry must take action. In this context and following the parliamentary elections, we would like to highlight some developments and issues that present challenges to our efforts to make progress. In order to meet these challenges, we call on the elected members of the ninth European Parliament, the new College of Commissioners that will take office in November 2019 and the forthcoming Presidencies of the Council of the EU to consider and address the following points in a sensible and operational manner to generate a satisfactory outcome for both civil society and the agricultural community.

New breeding techniques (NBTs)



Discussions on NBTs have recently gained momentum. Contributing factors include the 2018 European Court of Justice ruling in Case C-528/16, indicating that mutagenesis leads a priori to products subject to European legislation on GMOs, and the March 2019 report of the European Network of GMO Laboratories (ENGL) on the detection of plant products for food and feed produced by new mutagenic techniques. This report indicates that several problems related to the detection, identification and quantification of genomic publishing products are currently based on theoretical considerations and lack experimental evidence.

Uncertainty and lack of clarity prevail with potentially divergent rules across Europe, which is particularly damaging for maize and beet growers and for the downstream processing chain.

Reducing the use of plant protection products (PPPs) is an objective that maize and beet growers set themselves several years ago by engaging in integrated pest management, which has led to the use of techniques such as coated/granulated seeds, crop rotation optimization, precision agriculture... More recently, the development of robotics and digital agriculture has also begun to complete the agricultural toolbox.

New breeding techniques, including mutagenesis, are essential complementary tools to meet societal demand to reconcile agricultural production with sustainability and respect for the environment.

However, the investments in research and development and the time required to overcome the considerable technical obstacles are such that the uncertainty currently generated at European level may prevent the widespread use of NBTs and their permanent availability in the range of agricultural tools.

In the near future, we call for discussions between decision-makers and stakeholders to develop an appropriate and viable regulatory framework that takes into account the particular nature of NBTs. This framework must and can combine expertise while ensuring that consumers are

provided with safe, high quality and fortified food. The Agriculture and Progress platform wishes to play an active role in these discussions to generate legal and economic certainty as soon as possible.

Plant protection products (PPPs)



The phasing out and more selective use of some PPPs has started and the Agriculture and Progress platform is not opposed to this idea. However, we would like to issue a warning about the excessive willingness to accelerate and expand this process. Stopping the use of *hic and nunc* PPPs is neither feasible nor desirable and will have catastrophic consequences on agricultural production.

We would like to remind those concerned of the conclusions of the report published in March 2019 by the European Parliament's Research Service (EPRS) on the existence of agriculture without plant protection products. Feeding 11 billion people by 2100 without further increasing the amount of land used for agriculture requires increasing overall yield and reducing the yield gap. As to whether this can be done without PPPs or with reduced use, the report raises important questions. And in terms of "solutions", the report clearly refers to a combination of actions without completely eliminating PPPs.

Now that the REFIT (European Commission's regulatory fitness and performance programme) of the regulations on PPPs and MRLs (Maximum Residue Limit) has been finalised, we are awaiting proposals that the European Commission could potentially prepare to revise this legislative framework.

We call on decision-makers to ensure that the review of the already strict regulatory framework for PPPs and MRLs remains risk-based rather than hazard-based. It must be based on real scientific debates, facts and figures, not on alarmist statements.

Although the decline cannot be denied, the speed, intensity and reasons for the decline give rise to divergent scientific views. Science is the only viable basis for developing long-term sustainable policy for future generations.

Bee guidance



The EFSA guidance document on bees was developed in 2013 to carry out a risk assessment for pollinators, but has never been validated by Member States. In particular, on the basis of this document, EFSA published in February 2018 three reports on the risk assessment for bees concerning three neonicotinoids (imidacloprid, clothianidin and thiamethoxam), which eventually led to their prohibition on outdoor crops.

The current version of the guidance document on bees is obsolete, particularly with the introduction of new scientific methods.

In addition, the requirements set out in the document are not feasible due to the lack of validated study methods. This therefore has an impact on the outcome of the assessment, as in the absence of data or without clear confirmation of a low risk, EFSA's conclusion will always be that there is a risk or that the risk cannot be excluded. Finally, the guidelines give rise to many exemptions at Member State level.

The Agriculture and Progress platform strongly believes that risk assessment for pollinators is essential. However, it must be based on the most recent scientific discoveries and methods and must not lead to the complete disappearance of any authorised plant protection product. No to the current guidance document on bees; yes to a revised guidance document.

The platform is keen to engage in discussions with EFSA, the European Commission and Member States to develop this new guidance.

The innovation principle

The Agriculture and Progress platform regrets to see the progressive development of a very unhealthy and antagonistic relationship between two key principles that can perfectly coexist: the precautionary principle and the principle of innovation.



The precautionary principle is essential for the protection of human health and is enshrined in the Treaty on European Union. Applied proportionately and in accordance with the way the EU acquis provides for it, it has its *raison d'être*. The principle of innovation is part of good regulation and encourages sustainable growth, because only innovation can guarantee growth and employment, but above all to meet the social and environmental challenges we face. Innovation has been the key to the milestones of human evolution, particularly in agriculture. Innovation has played a key role in the stages of human evolution, particularly in agriculture. For example, in recent decades, innovation has led to the development and use of coated/granulated seeds, allowing a reduction in the amount of chemical active substances and more targeted application. Plant breeding techniques have been effective in controlling pests by selecting crop varieties that are inherently resistant to them. It is simply not true to suggest that innovation is a pretext used by industry - to which the agricultural community is too often assimilated in a simplistic way - to counter the precautionary principle and to put "dangerous" products on the market.

Without innovative techniques (see section on NBTs above, among others), the agricultural community and its users would be unable to guarantee a sufficient quantity and high quality of products to a growing world population.

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