



European
Commission

Horizon 2020
European Union funding
for Research & Innovation



Young Farmers - Future for Agricultural Cooperatives

On March 21, 2019, Martins Trons, agricultural policy expert and board member of the Union “Farmers’ Parliament”, attended the conference “Young Farmers and Future Agricultural Cooperatives organised by COPA-COGECA in Spain.”.

Nowadays many countries in Europe, unlike Latvia, do not have discussions about the necessity of cooperation and its benefits to farmers. From one point of view the lack of debate is understandable as elsewhere cooperation between farmers has been happening for more than 200 years whereas in Latvia – for about 20 years.

Nearly 300 participants, the majority of whom were young farmers from 24 European Union Member States, attended the conference. As acknowledged by Mr. Thomas Magnusson, President of COGECA, it is young farmers, men and women, who are the source of life for future agricultural cooperatives. Agricultural cooperatives need young farmers and young farmers need the cooperatives. It is an ideal opportunity to build together and to shape the sustainability of agricultural cooperatives’` sector in the future.

Some conference speakers acknowledged that young farmers are a minority in cooperative management therefore they should be involved in the management in the right moment either before they are establishing new families or when their children are large enough to have less concerns. The representatives from French Cooperatives stressed that women should also be in the management of cooperatives. In reply to the suggestions the Chief Executive of the Irish Co-operative Organisation Society joked that if only young farmers and women are going to manage cooperatives, then who is going to work there?

Young farmers in Spain are needed as now only 3.7% of the farmers are less than 40 years old, while on average in the EU the percentage is 5.9%. 75% of Spain's farmers are men, though this figure is decreasing.

In Latvia and also in many other countries the access to infrastructure – doctors, schools and high-quality Internet – was mentioned when describing the issues of life in rural areas. In the conference the issue of land was raised as one of the challenges in farming as 64% of the farmers surveyed in the EU recognised the lack of land as one of the biggest problems. Similarly, in a country like France, the young farmer has to prove himself before having the possibility to buy land.

During the conference, Martins Trons met with Jannes Maes, President of the European Council of Young Farmers (CEJA), and discussed the situation in Latvia's agriculture (support mechanisms for young farmers, Latvia's competitiveness in the EU single market, amount of direct payments in the EU and future cooperation opportunities).

The President of Ceja said that the CAP needed a “restart” in thinking of young farmers. As one of the problems, Janes Maes pointed out that farmers aged under 40 receive only 8% of the CAP's total benefits.

Jannes Maes promised to visit Latvia or Estonia this spring. We are hoping that he will also visit Latvia because we would like to show our organisation and how young farmers are working in Latvia!

Martins Trons, after the trip, acknowledged that this kind of exchange of experience was very valuable and helpful. He collected valuable opinions and insights that could be very useful when updating agricultural policy in Latvia and meeting with young farmers.

The exchange of experience was funded by EU's research and innovation programme “Horizon 2020” under grant agreement No 773757.





Martins Trons and Jannes Maes, President of the European Council of Young Farmers