the last word:

Our Food, Our Farms, Our Future

International Innovation presents extracts from a speech given by European Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development, Phil Hogan, at the VI Conference of Agricultural Co-operatives in Spain, regarding the current reform of the Common Agricultural Policy.

I STAND BEFORE YOU as European Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development, but I am addressing you also as a man raised on a family farm in the South East of Ireland. Like you, my heritage and roots run deep in the soil. [...] 

It is my belief that by drawing on the wealth of wisdom among Europe’s farming community, I will be in a stronger position to ensure that agricultural policy in the European Commission is ambitious and relevant for you and your work. [...] 

Let me begin by outlining the provisions in the new Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), which I believe are of most direct interest to you. I would like to emphasise the recognition at EU Commission level that both private and farmer co-op owned business models work hand in hand to deliver for their rural communities. This Commission understands the need to ensure that unfair trading practices do not further weaken and undermine the position of the producer in the food supply chain. [...] 

The recent reform of the CAP, as one example, includes measures to increase producer bargaining power by enhancing cooperation along the food chain. I believe that there are real and tangible opportunities for your sector contained in these measures, and I would urge your members to maintain and deepen your ongoing discussions about how you can take full advantage of these opportunities. In many cases, there will be no need to reinvent the wheel. [...] 

The reformed CAP also contains measures that should help farmers increase the number of contractual relations or get better returns by adding value to agricultural products. The Rural Development Programme can finance the integration of the various steps in the food chain, through processing, short supply chains, quality schemes and so on. At the European level, we will continue to work hard to deliver effective implementation of these measures. [...] 

But unfair practices can and will still happen across the food chain. It is essential that all involved (food chain actors and regulators alike) work together to tackle these imbalances. [...] The global picture is changing and the CAP must change with it. [...] 

The CAP has moved from a system of price support and protectionism, to a more market-orientated agriculture sector. This means we have a more modern, more competitive sector, and we have seen considerable investment and innovation as the sector has moved forward. [...] 

I am also determined to continue simplifying the CAP. My goal is to make work – and therefore life – more efficient and more productive for all players in the agri-food sector. [...] 

Ambitiously pursuing new markets for our high-quality EU produce remains one of my top priorities. With growing world food demand, the agri-food sector is the fourth largest export sector in the EU, increasing the value of its exports in the last five years by 70 per cent – which is faster than overall EU exports. Our strategy to take advantage of this opportunity must be twofold: we must continue to pursue new markets on the one hand, and guarantee the protection of high value EU products around the world on the other. [...] 

We have reformed the CAP to make it more market-orientated, and to reward farmers and agri-businesses willing to invest in becoming more efficient, more productive and more sustainable. We are backing innovation and research in the sector, notably through the €3.6 billion available at EU level between now and 2020 to fund synergies between agriculture and research, via Horizon 2020. [...] 

Our farm sector and our rural areas have fallen on hard times – but there’s money out there which can help us leave those times behind, if we’re smart enough to reach out for it. 

This speech was given on 10 June 2015 in Valladolid, Spain. For the full dialogue, visit: http://bit.ly/VICongressAgriculturalCooperatives_PhilHogan