

Draft Speech on Agriculture

Co-operatives have long been an established feature of European agriculture. Over half of the food produced in the European Union passes through them. The sector generates an annual income of 338 Billion Euros. It is also home to some of Europe's largest co-operatives, such as Arla Foods, which is owned by 12,700 farmers across the continent, and has an annual revenue of over ten billion Euros.

The success of co-operative agriculture is built on small scale farming. For these producers, collaboration carries a wide range of benefits. Through joint procurement of goods and services, they can reduce expenses, allowing them to share equipment that they could not justify purchasing outright. Co-operating in processing and marketing means that they can spend more time concentrating on output, resulting in a higher quality product.

Co-operatives can reduce risk to small producers by providing a source of cost effective loans when needed. They also give farmers an opportunity to tap into the combined knowledge and expertise of their counterparts, spreading productivity and innovation throughout the sector. For producers, agricultural co-operatives deliver the best of both worlds; allowing them to benefit from the stronger bargaining power and resources that comes with being part of a larger network, whilst at the same time preserving their independence from larger firms.

But co-operation in agriculture is also beneficial to wider society. Lower production and marketing costs can be passed onto the consumer through lower prices. A strong network of small scale farms allows profits to be reinvested into local communities, prevents the depopulation of rural areas, promotes better stewardship of the land, and has a positive effect on the environment by reducing the distance food travels to be sold. And it allows Europe's twin traditions of small scale farming and world-renowned quality food to be preserved.

For all these reasons, protecting and expanding the influence of co-operative farming should be at the heart of a progressive agenda for agriculture in the future.

Questions

- How can a strong co-operative agriculture sector improve the practices of the private sector?
- What can be done to raise public awareness of the advantages of buying from co-operative producers?
- What be done to protect and expand co-operative agriculture in the European Union?

