



MEPs to discuss the Le Foll report on EU agriculture & climate change

Within four decades another 3 billion people will occupy the earth. How we feed the planet in the face of that growth and the effects of climate change will be discussed by agriculture committee MEPs on Wednesday morning. A report by French Socialist MEP, Stéphane Le Foll, ahead of the meeting suggests better use of water, investment in energy efficient farming techniques and maintaining the capacity of soils and plants to absorb carbon. We spoke to Mr Le Foll ahead of the hearing.

The report lays out a number of options on how to reform the EU's Common Agriculture Policy (which swallows the lion's share of the Union's budget and is due to be reformed after 2013), in a way to help farmers reduce CO2 emissions and protect the environment.

Agriculture: 9% of EU's Greenhouse emissions

The hearing will draw in many specialists to offer their opinions about what route future policy should take. At present Europe's agriculture accounts for 9% of the EU's greenhouse gas and CO2 emissions.

The Le Foll report for the Parliament's Agriculture and Rural Development Policy calls for:

- More efficient irrigation to defend water supplies.
- Crop rotation to ward off disease and drought.
- Planting hedges or trees to protect farmland.
- Checking on insects and for diseases.
- Reducing methane and nitrous oxide emissions through changing diets and limiting fertilizers.

In terms of what farmers can do themselves Mr Le Foll told us "there are two objectives for agriculture. Firstly, it is necessary that agriculture itself emits less greenhouse gases and consumes less fossil fuel."

He goes on to say that "the second objective is to ensure that agriculture can sequester carbon. There are two elements that can fix carbon, the production of plants (through photosynthesis) and soils that can act as carbon storehouses".

He went on to say that "today there are 70 billion tonnes of carbon in the soil in Europe. It is the equivalent of 30 years of carbon releases across Europe".

"A diverse diet" lies ahead

How will this affect the eating habits of people in Europe? Mr Le Foll noted that habits were already changing in Europe such as people eating less meat.

In the short to medium term he is optimistic: "We must continue to have a diversified diet. There was a time when some thought we would end up eating pills with proteins. I remember these projections with individuals pictured with small boxes, eating protein pills every day. I think the future will rather be a return to a very diverse diet".

Summing up the situation and the way forward Mr Le Foll told us that "there has not been a major political transition to environmental agriculture until now". He therefore called for "a reorientation of agricultural support to all technologies and all the production models that are energy efficient, allowing maximum photosynthesis and maintaining the capacity of soils to sequester carbon".

With the European Parliament gaining new legislative powers in this field and a reform of the EU's Common Agricultural policy due after 2013, agriculture and rural development is quickly rising up the agenda.

The Parliament's Agriculture and Rural Development Committee will debate this report in Brussels on Wednesday from 0900 -1230.