

11/4/17

## Press Release

### **Copa and Cogeca underline at major event on “smart villages” that EU farmers and cooperatives are key drivers of rural areas and it’s crucial to ensure right infrastructures in place to fulfil potential #DynamicAgri**

Copa and Cogeca underlined at a major event on “smart villages” in Brussels today that EU farmers and their cooperatives are the key drivers of rural areas and it is crucial to ensure that the right infrastructures and broadband connectivity are there to keep them alive.

Speaking at the high-level event hosted by MEPs Tibor SZANYI and Franc BOGOVIČ, EU Commissioner Phil Hogan said “With Smart Villages, we are starting to deliver on some of the aspirations and recommendations of the Cork 2.0 Declaration for “A Better life in rural areas. He said that they will launch a thematic working group on smart villages in the European Network for Rural Development, bringing together people with practical experiences, policy makers and academics which can help us fuel our thinking for the future. EU Commissioner Cretu underlined the benefits of renewable energy for a low carbon economy and the need to overcome the digital divide and ensure that all villages are covered by broadband.

MEPs Tibor SZANYI highlighted the success of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) in ensuring high quality food at affordable prices for consumers but said that an attractive life in rural areas is missing to maximise the potential also for farmers. Whilst MEP Franc BOGOVIČ warned of the exodus from rural areas, with not enough talk about smart villages to attract young people.

Speaking at the event, Copa and Cogeca Secretary-General Pekka Pesonen stressed “We welcome the initiative launched on ”SMART villages” that has not only a huge importance for the farming sector but for rural areas as a whole. Implementation of the Cork 2.0 declaration – “A better Life in Rural Areas” - is essential to ensure the right tools are in place for a more sustainable and smarter countryside”.

He continued “Farmers are not only the first producers of food, they are also the first world exporter of agri-food and they play a crucial role in preserving our natural resources, creating growth and jobs in rural areas and providing an attractive countryside for agri-tourism. They are already investing and applying innovative solutions to remain competitive and sustainable in order to produce more efficiently using less resources and to respond to society’s demands. But this needs a toolbox that includes also smart villages, to attract youth and new comers to the sector. Rural-urban linkage is crucial as cities are an important market for farmers and their cooperatives. At the same time, cities depend on rural areas for food and rural tourism. This is a gap that we have to bridge!”

“We need to bring the consumer closer to the rural reality. Smart villages do play a crucial role in this. We must make the best use of all available funds, and not only agricultural funds. The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) including its rural development policy and the activities of rural networks are already delivering benefits to the rural community. But we also have to focus on the European Structural Funds and the European Fund for Strategic Investments that must contribute better to investments in rural areas to improve the infrastructures, education and

better use renewable raw materials. Access to broadband connectivity is after all not only important for the implementation of smart farming technologies, it is important for all types of SMEs in rural areas. Smart villages must be interconnected, not only digitally but also through public transport systems, buses and trains. There needs to be transregional planning in order to have effective and cost-efficient transport infrastructure”, he insisted.

The new data-supply chain also puts informed farmers in a new context and redefines their role in the supply chain. The farmer remains at the heart of collecting and processing of data. We need to have the right balance that ensures that the farmer gets a proper return from his data and, at the same time, guarantee that farmers can control and access farm data.

He underlined that only with a strong CAP budget and with increased support from the other funds, will farmers and rural areas be able to become smarter and better respond to the upcoming challenges facing them.

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For further information, please contact:

**Valentin Opfermann**

Policy Advisor

Tel.: +32 2 287 27 95

Valentin.Opfermann@copa-cogeca.eu

**Amanda Cheesley**

Press Officer

Mobile: + 32 474 840 836

amanda.cheesley@copa-cogeca.eu

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**CDP(17)3103:1**

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