

10/12/13

Press Release

In European Forest Week, Copa-Cogeca highlights how EU forest sector is key driver for growth and employment in EU rural areas

In European Forest Week, Copa-Cogeca underlined that the EU forest sector is a key driver for growth and employment in EU rural areas. And EU rural development policy will play a crucial role in ensuring that the new EU forestry strategy is a success, Copa-Cogeca Secretary-General Pekka Pesonen stressed.

Speaking at a press conference organised by Copa-Cogeca, Mr Pesonen welcomed the new EU forestry strategy, saying that it will provide a coherent framework to ensure that we have a consistent approach across all policy areas and take into account the new challenges for forests and the forestry sector like climate change, renewable energy, biodiversity, resource efficiency and the green economy.

The new EU Rural Development Policy will play an important role in successfully implementing the forest strategy and in helping the sector to face these new challenges and to benefit from the opportunities. Forests cover 40% of the EU area and are an important source of growth and employment in EU rural areas at the same time as protecting ecosystems. The strategy recognises the vital contribution the forest sector makes to the Europe 2020 Strategy and promotes opportunities to further develop the bio-economy.

Outlining details of the strategy, Mr Pesonen said that one of the strategic orientations clearly states that Member States should make use of rural development funds to improve competitiveness, promote diversification of economic activity and quality of life as well as deliver specific environmental public goods. Competitiveness is a key objective for the forest sector in order to provide growth and ensure employment in rural areas. The measure concerning investments in new forestry technologies and in the processing and marketing of forest products could meanwhile contribute to improving the production of wood, increase mobilisation and foster the efficiency of the activities in the forestry sector.

The "Setting up of producers groups" - a new measure for the forest sector that was introduced in the Rural Development Programme - needs also to be promoted and included in the national/regional programmes. This measure could increase the market orientation, support forest holders to work together on harvesting and availability of their products and also enhance the development of business and marketing skills and facilitation of innovation process.

He went on to present measures that could help forest holders to adapt to and mitigate climate change and to better use the resources and support biodiversity. "As we all know, 30% of rural development funds should be dedicated to the environment and climate related measures. Forestry measures are also included under this provision. Support to investments to improve the resilience and environmental value of forest ecosystems, to promote afforestation and the creation of woodland are essential measures to support the ecological role of forests. The forest sector is a vital source of biomass. These will impact positively on soil, water, air and biodiversity. "It is therefore crucial to boost the forest area", he said.

Wrapping up, Mr Pesonen highlighted the need to step up research and innovation and ensure knowledge is transferred. He urged Member States to show strong commitments to support the sector under the EU rural development programme .

Many events and communication campaigns are taking place this week during United Nations European Forest Week to highlight the importance of forests. See <http://www.fao.org/news/audio-video/detail-video/en/?uid=10241&wmode=1>

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