Francisco Martínez Arroyo: "in the debate of the CAP it is necessary to focus the consumers"

By Juan Herrera

Francisco Martínez Arroyo, Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Development of Castilla-La Mancha reviews in this interview for ECA AGRI the most important issues of his two years of management. These include the Department's commitment to generational change, greater visibility of women in agriculture, and cooperative projects, not to mention rural development and environmental policies.

ECA AGRI: after two years as a director, what is the balance of this period?

Francisco Martinez: the balance is positive because we have managed to put farmers in the focus of the policy of the Ministry, the focus of the policy of the Government of Castilla-La Mancha. *Farmers are essential in the region because they generate a very important part of our activity and they maintain in the rural environment. We have opted for young people, professionals, joint ownership projects, cooperative projects that have been commercially integrated and have built larger groups to better compete in the agri-food chain*, and we have changed the lines of operation

of rural development groups to make them more flexible and ambitious, can do more and can bet more on the diversification of rural economic activity. And all this we have done also by promoting environmental policies, which had been abandoned for many years.

ECA: it has always said that without water, agriculture disappears. Where is the solution to avoid problems of water scarcity in the region?

F.M.: *the first thing to do is to raise the issue of water at the national level because it is not an exclusive problem of Castilla-La Mancha, affects all regions of the country. It is necessary to make an ambitious approach, to reach consensuses between the different administrations and to count on the autonomous communities in the decision making; This is absolutely a priority*. Secondly, in Castilla-La Mancha it is necessary to use more water that passes through our autonomous community. This is possible and compatible with the maintenance of minimum ecological flows in better conditions than they are today. *The Tagus is an excellent example to observe that the ecological flows of some of our rivers are not adequate. And they are not because it follows a policy of transfers that is not a 21st century policy that we should be doing in Spain*. Farmers and livestock farmers in Castilla-La Mancha and the agro-food industry depend on water and have possibilities if a real state planning is done with the objective of improving the profitability of their crops, their farms, their industries and companies, Accessing a greater amount of water. This is possible and I hope that the Ministry of Agriculture is receptive to this offer we made from Castilla-La Mancha.

ECA: much is being said about the future CAP. What do you expect from the Common Agricultural Policy from 2020?

F.M.: to remain important, community-based, with European funds; to worry about farmers, farmers, industry, the rural milieu; and to continue making it possible for the rural environment to be alive and future. *To do this, it is necessary to put consumers at the center of the debate, which is ultimately the ones to be convinced that this policy is necessary. It is the consumers who finance it, and they also benefit from it fundamentally on two issues. The first, to obtain the best food in the world, with the highest guarantee of food safety and the highest quality; And second, because it maintains the territory, the rural environment and the environment*. These issues are so important that they must be an ambitious policy as the CAP should be from 2020.

ECA: what is the importance of cooperativism in the region?

F.M.: cooperatives have a very large weight, especially in very significant and representative products in Castilla-La Mancha, such as wine, oil or fruit and vegetables.

> "The agri-food sector can not be understood without cooperatives. There are sectors such as wine in which cooperatives account for 70% of the product that is produced in the region and this makes winegrowers the owners of the companies and, therefore, make decisions

> from a business perspective to add value to their products"

"Cooperatives must be larger from the economic point of view; *we have to bet because they are more powerful, stronger, and we are doing it prioritizing the processes of commercial integration of cooperative companies that achieve a minimum of billing in all lines where possible. We do this mainly in the line that supports the investments of the agri-food industry*, and we will do it in other lines of assistance where possible, because it is necessary that cooperatives are able to compete in markets at the national level, in relation to distribution, and at the international level, in its relationship with importers. *In this way we strengthen the weakest link in the agri-food chain".*

ECA: do you bet on your community for the development of food of differentiated quality, through D.O.Ps and I.G.Ps?

F.M.: for us it is absolutely a priority to put in value our designations of origin and protected geographical indications, and that are also our spearhead in the agri-food sector.

> We have 47 quality denominations in the region, 9 of them wine-growing, and we are working with all to have a presence in regional, national and international fairs with a brand of its own, with the Castilla-La Mancha brand

In the case of the nine wine denominations we have done so. *We have created a partnership with the sector, ADOVIN, which presents them all and with which we are attending the most important fairs, such as* FENAVIN*. We want to extend this to the other appellations of origin, and we have a specific line in the rural development program to support all the investments that in the matter of differentiated quality are making our companies and figures of quality*. We have conditioned from the first moment that all the promotion that is made with public funds of the region is through the appellations of origin. And I think that we benefit the whole sector.

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