

Smart Agro 2018 Forum: an approach to the future



The first edition of the Smart Agro Forum began with a few words of welcome from the General Director of Feria de Zaragoza, Rogelio Cuairán, giving the step to the intervention by the Director General of Rural Development, Innovation and Forestry Policy of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fishing and Food, Isabel Bombal, who outlined the main lines of work in relation to digitalization and the use of new technologies in the agri-food sector. "The digital transformation of the entire agri-food chain is a priority for MAPA and should affect the entire territory," he said.

In her speech, the general director explained the work being developed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to promote the digital transformation of the sector and the territory, linking its objective to maintaining the leadership of a sustainable economic, social and environmental sector. "In 85% of the Spanish territory, only 20% of the population lives. We have 66,000 km² with less than 8 inhabitants per km², digitization can help to reverse this situation ". In addition, he referred to the new Intelligent Rural Territories, which can help to reverse depopulation, although for this "adequate employment and life conditions must be generated".

Bombal highlighted the work carried out for several months by the Digitalization and Big Data Focus Group, led by the Ministry, and whose main results will be published in October in a special publication of the National Rural Network. These results form the basis of the new Digital Agenda, which will be subject to public consultation and is scheduled to be presented by Minister Luis Planas before the end of the year, with four strategic elements:

Combat the digital divide, both urban-rural and between small and large companies, offering

connectivity for all.

Encourage the use of data as a driving force for the sector.

Promote business development, new business models in smart agriculture and Industry 4.0.

Creation of an ecosystem, promotion of interactions, knowledge transfer and cooperation among the actors involved.

According to the general director, we are "at a propitious moment, a magma of very interesting debate for the digital transformation". "We are laying the foundations to culminate in a real transformation of the paradigm of our sector, that the sector is already a leader in many of the cases, that there is a great interest in the technological industries because they see its potential and the possibilities it offers," he added. .

Bombal also referred to the importance of digitization in the next PAC 2021-2027, from which the negotiation period is open and for which the Ministry seeks to achieve a common position of State before the European Council and Parliament. At the moment, the initiative that will promote the creation of Operative Groups and Innovative Projects is already in the programming period. And "the support for innovation and digitalization is even more intensified", with subsidies and aid aimed at the definitive impulse towards agriculture 4.0. The director recalled that the R & D & I policy of the next programming period will allocate some 10,000 million euros to the agricultural sector and the bioeconomy.

However, he pointed out that "the Spanish agri-food sector is a leader in many aspects and has nothing to envy to those of other countries, or even to other types of economic sectors that may seem more 'glamorous', modern or technological." "It is important to speak with pride and realism of our agri-food sector," he continued, "knowing that there are a number of barriers to achieve this transformation, but we must give visibility and capacity for the future with a boost from all public administrations to help the economy, employment and sustainability, for the benefit of all citizens".

Where does digitalisation lead to Spanish agriculture?

The initial technical presentation of the Forum, sponsored by BANCO SABADELL, BAYER, CASE IH, ITC, LG SEEDS and REGABER, was given by Luis Pérez-Freire, general director of the Technological Center of Telecommunications of Galicia (Gradient) and leader of the group of work 'Smart Farming and Food Security' of the European Alliance for Innovation in Internet of Things (AIOTI).

Pérez-Freire advocated a "green revolution" that emerged from the traditional systems of production and transformation of the agri-food industry and its alliance with digital technologies towards long-term sustainability, redefining value chains and business processes. Industrial.

He also referred to the main conditions of the agri-food sector, the role of digital technologies and their expected benefits in the sector, as well as the key aspects that will condition the development of agricultural digitalization.

According

It is a European multidisciplinary project involving 15 partners from eight countries of the European Union, led and presented at the Forum by prof. Emilio Gil Moya, from the Agricultural Mechanization Unit of the Polytechnic University of Catalonia, which aims to establish a thematic network dedicated to training and advice on phytosanitary application technologies.

The platform will be a tool for the promotion of the exchange of ideas, sharing of knowledge and detection of specific needs of the sector. A link between the scientific community, the advisors, the industry and the farmer.

Spraying, Equipment, Training and Advising (SETA) refers to the circle of tools needed to cover the use of PPP for crop protection, including spraying machinery and its components, electronic technologies (software and hardware) applied to sprayers and techniques of application of phytosanitary products. Gil took advantage of the stage to make known Dosaviña, a new free app that allows to calculate the optimal volume of application of phytosanitary products in the vineyard.

The Project lasts 36 months and has been financed with 2 million euros by the EU within its Horizon 2020 program.

Smart AG Services

It is a project of the Andalusian Operative Group 'Smart Ag Services' that aims to create an advanced agricultural precision service in associative agrarian entities for the efficient management of irrigation and fertilization taking into account the atmospheric conditions and the state of soil and cultivation.

His first months of activity have been devoted to building the prototype for data logging and web visualization and analysis solution. According to Manuel Pérez-Ruiz, professor at the Higher Technical School of Agronomists at the University of Seville, digitalisation represents an opportunity for growth for the agricultural sector, but it is also an important challenge, especially in the case of small children producers. In his opinion, it must be the farmers themselves who can not let a digital divide grow that undermines their marketing capacity and productivity.

In this scenario, according to Pérez-Ruiz, agrifood cooperatives are called to play a decisive role for the implementation of new technologies in the field, being aware that they must manage information and put it into value to improve their services. So far, the pilot project has been launched in two specialized in corn and citrus.

Joaquín Olona: "Digitization will be useful if it contributes to the maintenance of family farming"

The closing table to five intense hours of Forum was formed by José Antonio Domínguez, managing director of the Center for Research and Agri-Food Technology of Aragon (CITA), accompanied by Ángel Samper, secretary general of Asaja Aragón, who listed the projects in which The association participates and denounced the problem posed by the "contamination" of contents that reach society, even from the scientific sphere.

Finally, the Minister of Rural Development and Sustainability of the Government of Aragon, who focused on how the challenge of Agriculture 4.0 can help to strengthen the model of family farming. "The digitization of the sector must be useful for farmers, who are not always the most beneficiaries of the advances". Joaquín Olona is clear that "Agriculture 4.0 does not need public support for its extension because it is unstoppable." "He needs it to be applied for the benefit of farmers and family farming," he added.