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Op-ed by Lone Andersen

Delivering, inspiring and improving – thoughts on the future of organic farming

Today IFOAM, the international organic association, is debating the future of organic farming in Bucharest. As the Copa-Cogeca Organic Working Party Chairwoman, I am delighted to be monitoring the development of this event for two main reasons: firstly because Copa's President, Joachim Rukwied, is invited to deliver a key note speech showing (once again) that there is ongoing dialogue within the European farming community and secondly because of the topic of the event itself: "**Innovation and technology - How organic improves, inspires & delivers**". As I was unable to join the participants in Romania, let me share some of the Copa-Cogeca Organic Working Party's thoughts on this issue.

Deliver - It is a well-known fact now that over the past ten years the area under organic production has increased by 70% and in 2017 reached some 12.6 million hectares in the EU. In other words, organic farming is becoming more mainstream. This is what we were rooting for and I am delighted to see consumers and especially our younger generations opting for organic. We now need to understand and face the challenges associated with this growing popularity. We have a lot to learn from various production models. Farmers across the EU, be they organic, conventional, extensive or intensive, need to retain their competitiveness and remain economically viable. Therefore, despite all external pressure, organic farming needs to control its growth and be as market-driven as possible. Overproduction, drops in prices and pressure from retailers could be highly counterproductive. As farmers, we know that stable growth should never be taken for granted.

Inspire - Being an organic farmer is often synonymous with being a pioneer. Pioneers, try, test and propose solutions. I am convinced that organic farmers should also be front runners in the quest for better crop management to meet weed, pest, disease and fertilisation needs. We should not shy away from introducing highly innovative practices onto our fields as soon as they respect our farming ethics and guiding principles. For example, I would very much like to see organic farmers across Europe using affordable weeding robots powered by solar energy. European farmers are the first to feel the effects of global warming and will have to cope with the consequences of extreme weather conditions on their crops, including an increase in plant diseases and fungi. Organic farmers should also be on the front line in the fight for reliable alternatives and monitoring solutions. We are not end-consumers of agronomic or technical innovations, but rather active partners in the search for solutions and adaptation opportunities. This is particularly true for access to plant varieties that are adapted to organic needs. Part of the solution lies in our ability to promote characteristics, such as disease resistance, tolerance to drought stress, or higher yield potential. Today, we need research and advanced technologies in plant breeding if we also want to respond to societal and climate concerns.

Improve - As an organic livestock farmer, one issue that has increasingly come to my attention year after year are the imports of organic protein from third countries to feed our farm animals. Indeed, organic livestock production currently needs to import protein-rich animal feed. Organic production requirements make it even more complex to source suitable protein from such countries. A growing demand for organic livestock would only make this more of a cause for concern across Member States. In concrete terms, the European Commission registered an increase of 11% per year over the past three years in organic dry pulses and other protein crops

for feed. This trend is likely to continue. This is why we need to reconsider more local production. In this context, Commissioner Phil Hogan's announcement on the development of plant protein in the European Union last November marked a step in the right direction. However, we will have to go beyond the proposed measures in organic farming and be more innovative. Research into removing methionine and lysine amino acids from grass and other regional organic products is promising and the same goes for the developments in the production of insects for feed.

Finally, organic farming, like the rest of the farming sector, will work to improve its carbon footprint and reduce its greenhouse gas emissions. As an organic dairy farmer, I have been working with my cooperative over the past few years to measure and monitor my emissions while also working on pragmatic reduction actions. Technology is proving to be a great help.

Organic farming is currently at a crossroads. New questions are being raised and innovation and technology will, without a doubt, lie at the heart of future key developments. At Copa and Cogeca, we have been active over the past 15 years in following and supporting the evolution of the sector in our Working Party. I will do my very best to ensure the development of a strong and innovative organic sector.

Lone Andersen, Chairwoman of Copa and Cogeca Organic working party

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Note to the editors:

- The following op-ed was released on Thursday 20th June on Ms [Lone Andersen LinkedIn account](#).
- Lone Andersen is an organic dairy farmer who lives in the western part of Denmark. The farm, which she owns together with her husband, converted to organic production in 2009, which included a period of mixed farming with conventional pig production and organic dairy production. At present, the farm is 100% organic and is made up of 90 ha of arable land and 115 milking cows. The farm cooperates with organic crop producers who supply organic roughage for the milking cows. Lone Andersen has been involved in agricultural policy work since 2004 and in 2013 she was elected Chairwomen of the Danish Family Farmers' Association. In the same year, she was also elected Vice-President of the Danish Agriculture & Food Council, which represents the vast majority of the Danish agriculture and food industry.
- For more information about EU farmers' and agri-cooperatives' priorities for the EU institutions 2019-2024 please head to www.wefarm4.eu.

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