



Report

Turning carbon farming into a reality: *Discussion on carbon farming has been bringing more and more clarity in the understanding and design of schemes in favor of the concept, but how can we bring it to reality?*

On 13th of November 2020, the Agriculture & Progress Platform held a webinar on “Carbon farming – How to bring this innovative concept to life” under the patronage of MEP Irène Tolleret and with presentations from Nicola Di Virgilio from DG Agriculture of the European Commission, WWF Germany director Dr Rolf Sommer and Edouard Lanckriet from Agrosolutions. The topic proved to be very much in line with current debates, with over 150 interested participants attending.

With new climatic targets for 2030 and an objective to reduce greenhouse emissions by at least 55% compared to 1990, the EU has been zooming in on the agriculture sector. As the Green Deal is moving forward, it is important to remember that despite being responsible for more than 10% of greenhouse gas emissions, we should not underestimate the role played by the agricultural system in the preservation of soil. “Farmers are the solution to fight against climate change, not the problem” says MEP Irène Tolleret. Carbon farming or carbon sequestration would allow just that by performing the long-term capture of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, slowing down the CO₂ pollution and aiding plant growth, among other beneficial effects. Despite problems such as carbon leakage effect, leading to increased emissions elsewhere across the different sectors, there are many advantages of carbon farming for soil fertility, productivity and increased climate resilience.

Carbon farming can be a tool for farmers to participate in a greener world, despite not being a miracle cure: Dr Rolf Sommer warns that we must however manage expectations: “as a standalone measure, carbon farming is NOT enough.” We must also have ambitious reduction targets in all sectors. With that in mind, carbon farming has several advantages (increasing the preservation of carbon in soil, benefiting soil fertility, protecting our already carbon rich soils, increasing storage for our forestation etc.) and farmers as well as foresters are the only ones who can actually sequester carbon. It is a new income opportunity while providing eco-system services.

There is however a need for the EU to provide farmers with strong support and to encourage carbon farming. As Edouard Lanckriet points out, carbon storage in agricultural soils is one of the rare environmental measures compatible with most of the current challenges facing farmers. And they need help even more since they suffer from an image given to them by society of being responsible for many environmental disasters. Thanks to carbon sequestration, farmers be part of the solution for climate change. We need better incentives for farmers and foresters, and to create a better business model for them. We need carbon calculators in the hands of farmers. While farmers are very open to this transformation, it will still require a big adaptation effort of their production systems, which means a cost that they cannot carry on their own, as well as technical help. Farmers are also the ones who know their farms, soils and ecosystems best, which means some flexibility and freedom to implement the project.

Nicola Di Virgilio pointed out that “Policy issues need to be addressed” and the local context must be taken into account. There is a need to define the baselines, monitoring, reporting, and transparency. We also need a robust certification rule as well as a reference base so as to avoid losing carbon. Since not all soils are the same, we may require quite a heterogeneous mosaic. Carbon farming is but one of the concepts that may bring solidity to a Green EU, but for it to become a reality, concrete and extensive policy measures are needed.

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