

PRESS RELEASE

Re-Imagine Europa launches new Task Force on “Sustainable Agriculture and Innovation”

Brussels, 17 November 2020

Today, Re-Imagine Europa, together with ALLEA and EU-SAGE, announced the launch of a new Task Force on "Sustainable Agriculture and Innovation" chaired by Carlos Moedas, former European Commissioner for Research, Science, and Innovation. This initiative aims to build inclusive and pragmatic proposals on how innovation can support the creation of more sustainable and resilient European agricultural systems. To achieve this, the Task Force will convene an Expert Committee of approximately 100 prominent individuals representing a multitude of perspectives from academia, politics, and key stakeholder groups.

“We need to change the way we reflect on future proofing regulation so that our laws can keep up with our labs.”

Carlos Moedas, Chair

Today’s launch coincides with the first meeting of the Task Force’s Steering Committee, a smaller group who will coordinate the work of the Expert Committee. The Steering Committee currently consists of the following experts: Prof. Anne Cambon-Thomsen [CNRS, EGE]; Prof. Maria da Graça Carvalho MEP; Prof. Paolo De Castro MEP; Garlich von Essen [Euroseeds], Prof. Dirk Inzé [VIB-UGent Center for Plant Systems Biology], Dr. Peter Kearns [formerly of the OECD]; Pekka Pesonen [Copa-Cogeca], Prof. Pere Puigdomènech [ALLEA, Center for Research in Agricultural Genomics]; Dr. Daria Tataj [Tataj Innovation]; Nils Torvalds MEP.

With the COVID-19 crisis providing an additional impetus to rethink our social and economic models, the European Green Deal outlines a roadmap to make Europe the first climate-neutral continent by 2050. The recent Farm to Fork Strategy is at the heart of these objectives and further highlights the inextricable links between healthy people, healthy societies, and a healthy planet. In addressing this context, the Task Force aims to go beyond traditional divides to explore what a European model for sustainable agriculture might look like and investigate what needs to be done to achieve it.

There is an abundance of novel technologies worthy of discussion, for example, highly performative digital tools that allow more sophisticated uses of new biotechnologies and rapidly developing cultured meat and protein alternatives. However, the Task Force will first concentrate on the application of gene editing for agricultural purposes. With the [European Commission](#) set to deliver a major study on the topic to the European Council by April 2021, this is a pressing issue, the resolution of which stands to have significant implications for the future of European agriculture, and innovation's role therein. This also gives the Task Force an excellent opportunity to test and fine-tune its methodology, before applying it to debates about other emerging technologies.

Alongside its partners EU-SAGE and ALLEA, Re-Imagine Europa has been conducting preparatory work on this topic for some time. This began with the launch of the 'Science in Society Salon' in cooperation with the European Commission's Scientific Advice Mechanism (SAM) and Group of Chief Scientific Advisors, following the publication of the Group of Chief Scientific Advisors' [statement](#) outlining 'A Scientific Perspective on the Regulatory Status of Products Derived from Gene Editing and the Implications for the GMO Directive'. Following the second edition of the Salon, then Commissioner Moedas presented Re-Imagine Europa's report '[Genome Editing in Agriculture – Implications for Society](#)' to the European Parliament in October 2019.

Following a rigorous mapping exercise conducted by Re-Imagine Europa in recent months, the work of the Task Force will now step up a gear as our experts come together to develop concrete policy and narrative proposals in the form of a series of publicly available reports. This work will also form the basis of a comprehensive programme of outreach and engagement activities.

To stay up to date with the progress being made by the Task Force on Sustainable Agriculture and Innovation as well as Re-Imagine Europa's other initiatives, please keep any eye on our website (<https://reimagine-europa.eu/>) and Twitter (<https://twitter.com/ReimagineEuropa>).

Re-Imagine Europa (RIE) is an “incubator” for new political ideas, acting as a convener, catalyst and communicator in order to deliver world-class interdisciplinary and intersectoral research, and the facilitation of dialogue and engagement on issues of a strategic importance to Europe. RIE’s methodology relies on teamwork and collective intelligence by bringing together experts with varying backgrounds and organisations. RIE’s aim is to engage people in building shared visions that can have a positive impact on their future, integrating the increasingly influential stream of research that demonstrate the integration of cognition and emotion in political decision-making.

EU-SAGE is a network representing over 130 European research centres, institutions and organisations working in the area of plant science. Following the Court of Justice of the EU’s 2018 ruling in case c-528/16, many of these organisations joined forces to call upon European policy makers and politicians to take appropriate action to safeguard genome editing for sustainable agriculture. This was then formalized in 2019 as the EU-SAGE network, coordinated by VIB-UGent Center for Plant Systems Biology. It is the firm conviction of EU-SAGE that Europe should be able to use genome editing techniques where they contribute to a more sustainable agriculture and food production.

ALLEA is the European Federation of Academies of Sciences and Humanities, representing more than 50 academies from over 40 countries in Europe. Since its foundation in 1994, ALLEA speaks out on behalf of its members on the European and international stages, promotes science as a global public good, and facilitates scientific collaboration across borders and disciplines. Jointly with its Member Academies, ALLEA works towards improving the conditions for research, providing the best independent and interdisciplinary science advice, and strengthening the role of science in society. In doing so, it channels the intellectual excellence and experience of European academies for the benefit of the research community, decision-makers and the public.

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