

12 March 2018

## JOINT STATEMENT ON THE REVISION OF THE EU BIOECONOMY STRATEGY

European farmers, forest owners and their cooperatives consider that the process of the revision of the EU Bioeconomy Strategy and its Action Plan provides a great opportunity to include concrete actions to support primary producers as they play a crucial role to successfully further develop the bioeconomy in the EU. EU needs a more ambitious EU Bioeconomy Strategy that takes into account the contribution that bioeconomy could have not only on the economic sustainability of the rural areas but also to the environmental and social sustainability.

We do consider that the importance of the bioeconomy is still underestimated at EU level and better policy coherence and coordination is still needed. There is a need for creating a stronger link between the updated EU Bioeconomy Strategy and the future CAP, the future Cohesion policy and also the EU Forest Strategy that is currently being reviewed by the Commission. This gap can be seen in the legislations on 2030 Climate and Energy Package and in legislations and initiatives of the Circular Economy Package.

Moreover, we welcome the publication of the Roadmap on the update of the 2012 Bioeconomy Strategy that highlights that the revised strategy should go beyond research and innovation. This exercise should provide a reinforced framework that builds on the EU's common efforts to accelerate the transition from a fossil-based to a more bio-based economy with the inclusion of renewable raw materials for energy sector. Moreover, the exercise should promote the further development of rural areas and offer new business opportunities along the value chain. Consequently, it should stress the importance of having an entire value chain perspective and focus on better use of existing co- and by products from agriculture and forestry sectors to material, heat, power and fuel production. The Roadmap presents eight priority points on which the future strategy and action plan should focus on. European farmers, forest owners and their cooperatives consider that for the update of the EU Bioeconomy and its Action Plan the following elements should be included as new actions or detailed actions:

### **1. Promote and include actions to increase the sustainability of primary producers as backbone in the bio-based value-chain**

EU-grown sustainable biomass is the first enabler of an EU bioeconomy and further boosts the vitality of the entire value-chain. Promoting and supporting sustainable biomass production and mobilisation in the EU is key to further developing the bioeconomy, and consistent with worldwide sustainable development based upon renewable resources. Involvement of primary producers in the structures of the bioeconomy initiatives and decision making processes is of utmost importance to strengthen partnerships between different actors of society and enhance public awareness of the sustainable use of biomass resources.

We consider that one of the main priorities should be to **support investments and enhance advisory services, knowledge transfer, skills and training for farmers, forest owners and their cooperatives.**

**The Action Plan should highlight the importance of the future CAP in supporting the development of the bioeconomy**, for example via the provision of the right tools for primary producers to foster active land management, prevent land abandonment, support investments to foster innovation and increase productivity, stimulate a more efficient use of resources and the implementation of precision farming and forestry, and encourage generational renewal. This should be accompanied by adequate advisory and training services and knowledge transfer tools that help primary producers to adapt to new challenges and benefit from new opportunities. All these measures should promote the sustainability and competitiveness of the agriculture and forestry sector, both of which are essential to develop bioeconomy in the EU.

Progress in the bioeconomy can only be achieved if rural areas are attractive to live and work in for future generations. Therefore, **the EU regional development policy post 2020** should further support rural development by providing enough funding for the infrastructure, broadband and services needed for efficient rural business and wood mobilisation. In addition, **regional smart specialisation strategies** that focus on bioeconomy need to be encouraged by the Commission and used by Member States in the future programming period.

In order to ensure a sustainable development of bioeconomy, we need to continue to support an efficient use of resources and to avoid any promotion of principles such as “the cascade use” that goes against a market oriented economy. Any link between this approach and bioeconomy will be detrimental to the development of local supply chains and will lead to overly-prescriptive administrative burden.

## **2. Ensure greater coherence and coordination between all relevant EU policies and objectives that contribute to de-fossilising the EU economy**

In order to **guarantee the strategy’s success** in the future, we consider that one of the **main priorities** for the revision of the strategy should be policy coherence and coordination. In addition, this should be supported by **adequate funding and simplified mechanisms** at EU and national/regional level for the further development of the circular bioeconomy. Although these were among the objectives of the current strategy, they were only partially achieved.

This could be improved through a **targeted bioeconomy action plan** with specific measures and dedicated funding. This would provide the right framework to ensure competitive and sustainable bio-based sectors that could help the EU tackle important challenges such as climate change, jobs and growth and halt rural exodus.

We strongly believe that the revised strategy should focus on ensuring **coherence and coordination between EU policies and objectives**: the post 2020 Common Agriculture Policy (CAP), research and innovation initiatives, the EU Forest Strategy, regional policies, the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI), COSME (the EU programme for the competitiveness of SMEs), the Circular Economy, the 2030 Climate and Energy Package as well as the, the EU Biodiversity Strategy.

**Synergies between the CAP and the research and innovation policies** are crucial to further boost the contribution of the primary sector to the bioeconomy as well as to increase the availability and circularity of biomass, side-streams, co- and by-products. Topics such as climate change and adaptation, storage and mobilisation of biomass, and productivity, sustainable forest management, plant breeding, water and soil, risk prevention need to be better addressed in future research and innovation programmes and to be accompanied by specific measures under the future CAP. Research and innovation initiatives and programmes should be made

more attractive for businesses in order to enhance upscaling and further boost untapped innovation potential.

In order to enhance policy coherence and coordination, a high-level group on the circular bioeconomy could be established at the European Commissioner level to follow the implementation of a more ambitious EU Action Plan on the bioeconomy.

In addition, the **Bioeconomy Knowledge Centre**<sup>1</sup> should play an important role in finding solutions on how to turn knowledge into growth by promoting the exchange of knowledge on the bioeconomy and on how to manage its demand and supply. For an efficient work of the center in helping to an efficient implementation of the strategy, the Centre should have a good coordination and cooperation with other relevant initiatives as well as with the EU Rural Networks (EIPAgri and ENRD).

### **3. Raise awareness of existing legislations and market-based tools to back up sustainable use of renewable raw materials**

In the same context of policy and incentives coherence, the revised strategy should also come up with concrete proposals on how **to raise awareness and promote the benefits of bio-based products to stimulate market demand**. In this context, the existing legislative and non-legislative sustainability framework for renewable raw materials should be acknowledged and promoted.

We therefore believe that the European Commission should better promote the replacement of fossil-based raw materials with EU grown renewable materials in strategic sectors such as energy, construction, packaging, automotive, fertiliser and textile industries.

In addition, the EU should show **clear preference for bio-based products** in public procurement and/or tax regulation.

Concrete proposals should also be included in the action plan such as **EU targeted public awareness campaigns** on the benefits of bio-based products. Moreover, proposals for tools based on successful projects are needed at regional and local level.

**European farmers, forest owners and their cooperatives are convinced that the above proposals for the revision of the strategy are essential in further ensuring its implementation. In addition, these will support existing and future investments in rural areas to develop and expand the bioeconomy in the EU. This will contribute to achieve EU priorities but also to fulfilling the EU's commitments to the Paris Agreement and UN Sustainable Development Goals.**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://biobs.jrc.ec.europa.eu/>