

Weaving Common Ground: Intergenerational Dialogue at the European Rural Gathering 2024

Introduction: A Call for Common Ground

*Across Europe, farming models are evolving, from traditional family-run operations to innovative structures such as cooperatives and community farming. What unites them is their potential to contribute to eco-friendly, small-scale, agroecological practices, standing in stark contrast to industrial megafarms. At the Weaving Common Ground gathering last November, one recurring theme that resonated throughout the event was the urgency of **generational renewal in farming**. Report by Simone Matouch.*

Weaving Common Ground between Generations

The critical topic of intergenerational dialogue in farming took center stage in a workroom facilitated by policy expert **Elena Almbühl** and Forum Synergies' coordinator **Simone Matouch**. Participants explored the complexities of farm succession—a process that mirrors the metaphor of "weaving common ground" between generations. Discussions were framed by an overview by Elena of the challenges surrounding access to land, and potential pathways for improvement. Simone then spotlighted some legal tools and incentives to facilitate farm succession and inheritance in her home region of Carinthia, Austria.

Challenges in Farm Succession

Whether through family inheritance or new non-family arrangements, the handover of farms brings both challenges and opportunities. Participants identified several pressing issues affecting farm succession across Europe:

1. Declining Successor Numbers

A significant number of farms are at risk of closure due to a lack of successors. At the same time, aspiring farmers often face barriers to land access, including exorbitant prices and speculative land markets.

2. Negative Narratives About Farming

For many farming families, narratives such as “*hard work, low income*” deter younger generations from taking over farms. Additionally, traditional gender roles still play a role, with farms often passed down to sons rather than daughters. Encouragingly, participants from Plessé, France, shared that more well-educated women are now showing interest in farming careers.

3. Generational Misalignment

Differences in values and life priorities between older and younger generations also pose challenges. For example, the older generation often prioritizes a 24/7 work model, while younger farmers value work-life balance and family time. A Polish participant noted the social difficulty farmers face, observing that *only 1 in 10 young farmers can find a partner willing to manage a farm together*.

4. Social and Cultural Obstacles

Patriarchal structures and multi-generational living arrangements can complicate farm handovers. In some cases, young families taking over farms must also assume responsibility for elderly relatives, often leading to social tension. Women marrying into farming families

frequently face unique challenges, having to assert their interests within extended family structures.

Proposed Solutions: Weaving Opportunities

Participants identified several innovative solutions spanning economic, social, and legal aspects:

1. Economic Tools

- Establishing a *European Land Observatory* to monitor land prices and regulate speculation. Land should not be treated purely as a commodity.
- Addressing housing costs and ensuring affordable land access for aspiring farmers.

2. Connecting Generations

- Creating platforms to link retiring farmers with newcomers, such as the Austrian initiative [Perspektive Landwirtschaft](#).
- Proposing a *FarmErasmus* program to foster cross-border exchange, enabling farmers to share experiences and learn from successful examples of intergenerational cooperation.

3. Legal Support

- Designing incentives to ease farm transitions, such as tax breaks or pension schemes for retiring farmers willing to hand over their land.
- Value of land - calculated based on its productive value rather than its market value

Commitments: Changing Narratives and Strengthening Action

The conclusion of the European Rural Gathering emphasized that the future of farming lies in breaking down barriers, fostering collaboration, and shifting perspectives. A key takeaway was the **need to challenge the prevailing narrative that farming is “hard and without future”**. Participants recognized that changing this perception is essential to attracting new generations to agriculture and ensuring its sustainability.

Building on this consensus, participants made the following commitments:

1. Changing the Farming Narrative

Participants from the active farming sector pledged to share their positive experiences and inspiring views to counteract negative perceptions. Platforms such as [Letters from the Farm](#) were highlighted as effective means to amplify these stories, showcasing the rewards and opportunities that farming offers.

2. Strengthening Women Farmers' Networks

Acknowledging the critical role of women in agriculture, participants committed to expanding support for women farmers' networks. A new initiative, *Women Heroes*, will be launched as a dedicated strand within ARC2020's communication efforts, providing a platform for articles and stories celebrating the contributions of women in agriculture.

3. Practical Support for Farm Handover

To address the complexities of farm succession, Simone Matouch offered to

organize a practical meeting in her home region of Carinthia, Austria. This gathering, available upon request, would focus on sharing real-life experiences, discussing innovative succession models, and exploring incentives to support smoother transitions between generations.

Conclusion: A Shared Responsibility

The European Rural Gathering in Grzybów underscored the **urgent need for action to support generational renewal in farming**. By addressing the barriers to land access, tackling social and cultural challenges, and fostering innovative programs like FarmErasmus, rural communities can ensure that small-scale, eco-friendly farming continues to thrive.

A key opportunity to make youth voices heard is the European Rural Parliament in Scotland in October 2025. Building on the outcomes of the exchanges in Grzybów, as well as its long-running scholarship programme, Forum Synergies is working to empower rural youth actors to play a central role in this participative democratic process.

Ultimately, "weaving common ground" is more than a metaphor—it is a shared responsibility to bridge generations and sustain the heart of rural Europe.