

For an ambitious European research in support of agricultural, food, and environmental transition

By the AGRALIFE program agency and its members

Last July, the European Commission released its proposals for the next Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (FP10), the European Competitiveness Fund, and the 2028-2034 budget marking the start of a decisive period. As leading players in French public research and innovation (R&I) in agriculture, food, forestry, natural resources, the bioeconomy and the One Health and One Welfare approach, we want to help clarify a few points related to our research areas in order to better address the systemic challenges facing Europe today: climate change, biodiversity loss, food sovereignty, the health of humans, animals and ecosystems, as well as competitiveness and economic sovereignty.

In a global context shaped by growing geopolitical tensions, pressures on natural resources, and recurring climate shocks, our agricultural, forestry, and food systems must remain at the center of strong, structural research and development efforts that rise to the challenges of sovereignty, sustainability, and public health.

An ambitious program

The FP10 proposal presented by the European Commission is based on a pillar structure that does not differ much from the current Horizon Europe programme. However, the way Pillar 2 is structured **may not leave enough room for agricultural and food-related issues**.

Integrating agriculture and the bioeconomy into the new **"Health, biotech, agriculture and bioeconomy"** window of the future programme is a positive signal. But in order to truly meet today's challenges, while ensuring consistency and building upon the results achieved in previous framework programmes, this window will need substantial financial resources. Therefore, the following priority areas will need ring-fenced budgets within Pillar 2:

- agroecological transition of agricultural and food systems, both terrestrial and aquatic,
- security and resilience of agricultural, food, and forestry systems,
- sustainable management of natural resources,
- and integrated protection of socio-ecosystems according to the "One Health" approach.

We regret that none of the so-called **"Moonshots"** projects target food, agricultural, aquatic, or forestry systems, despite their strategic importance for Europe's sovereignty. We call for the inclusion of ambitious R&I initiatives in the form of Moonshots and other instruments, focused on agroecology, food security, and the resilience of territories, natural habitats (land and water areas), on an equal footing with industrial priorities.

It is also essential that research planning in FP10 allows research infrastructures to remain at the highest level, complementing technological infrastructure. Beyond knowledge generation, these infrastructures can serve to test certain proofs of concept.

Support throughout the innovation chain

It is imperative to maintain support across the entire research-development-innovation continuum, from exploratory projects to highly mature technological demonstrators, including initiatives that promote and transfer innovations to the field. This diversity is what connects different initiatives, builds bridges between disciplines, stakeholders, and sectors, and speeds up the adoption of robust, sustainable solutions on the ground. A portfolio approach – combining projects at various TRL levels, as well as societal innovation that informs public policy – would help to strike a balance between the various

approaches and foster synergies between initiatives, while making public and private spending more efficient. Such an approach must also recognise and support the diversity of stakeholders involved in the transitions: research organisations, but also technical centers, farmers and food producers, local authorities, public bodies, consumers, businesses, and advisory organisations – all of whom play a key role in putting innovations into practice.

How does this fit in with the European Competitiveness Fund?

Research priorities on agriculture, food, and the bioeconomy cannot be solely guided by an industrial focus within the new European Competitiveness Fund, linked to FP10 through the “policy window”. FP10 must remain **centered on excellence, autonomy and scientific integrity, as well as cooperation, and open governance to serve public interest**. For this reason, the governance model proposed must meet two criteria that make the current Horizon Europe a transparent program: first, research work programmes and calls for proposals must be designed by scientists, and second, Member States must be involved in defining FP10’s research strategies. In this context, it will be essential to ensure coordination among all stakeholders to guide a balanced R&I programming that addresses the challenges facing agricultural and food systems, both terrestrial and aquatic, over the short, medium, and long term.

Short-term efforts to maintain Europe’s competitiveness in the global race are not enough to develop the solutions our sectors will need tomorrow. Agricultural, food, and environmental transitions take time to build. **Without a long-term vision, Europe is jeopardizing its future competitiveness.**

A research agenda driven too heavily by industrial and technological priorities under the Competitiveness Fund would compromise the programme’s ability to meet environmental, social, and territorial challenges. Innovation in agricultural, forestry, and food systems must go beyond developing and transferring technologies to businesses. European collaborative research delivers much more: it fosters knowledge exchange between stakeholders, supports change directly with those involved (farmers and producers, SMEs, technical centers, cooperatives, advisors, local authorities, citizens, etc.), and helps inform public policy. **It is this intertwining of economic, environmental, and societal dimensions that gives collaborative research its strength** and enables the development of truly transformative solutions. Europe’s sustainable and competitive transition requires continued support for research and innovation led by this collective ecosystem, capable of generating multiple impacts beyond economic results alone.

Strengthening international openness and the coherence of European policies

The success of FP10 also depends on its ability to coordinate with other instruments of the European Union’s external action (NDICI – Global Europe, Erasmus+, etc.) and to promote fair scientific cooperation with partner countries. This requires strengthened coordination between the relevant Directorates-General (RTD, INTPA, AGRI, ENV, CLIMA, EAC) to ensure an integrated, coherent, and strategic approach to major global challenges. It is essential to break down the barriers between R&I, education, and external action in order to increase the impact and coherence of European and

international collaborations, thereby supporting competitiveness and addressing the challenges facing our systems.

Real impact through collaborative projects

Collaborative research is one of the European Union's major strengths. By pooling knowledge, expertise and infrastructures, European research delivers new solutions, as illustrated by the projects led by and/or involving our organizations:

- Climate Farm Demo and ClenFarms, two projects developing and deploying solutions to help farmers and agricultural advisors tackle climate change and improve resilience to climate hazards;
- PPilow, which develops tools and solutions for free-range, organic, and low-input farming to improve the welfare of poultry and pigs;
- PHENET, which brings together four European research infrastructures on plant phenotyping, ecosystem experimentation, long-term observation, data management, and bioinformatics to jointly develop new tools and methods for identifying combinations of species, genotypes, and sustainable management practices;
- SpongeWorks, a project at the crossroads of the Climate, Soil, and Water Missions, which evaluates and deploys sponge-based measures to improve water retention and help European landscapes adapt to changing flood and drought patterns.

A decisive moment for Europe

Europe cannot face tomorrow's challenges alone. But without strong, integrated, inclusive, and ambitious European research, it will not be able to rise to the challenge. FP10 must serve as a strategic lever to support the sustainable transformation of our agricultural and food systems, forests and territories. We call for this ambition to be made a priority, in the service of European resilience and competitiveness.

