

***On April 8<sup>th</sup>, European Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development Phil Hogan will open the academic year at the Accademia dei Georgofili, Florence***

It is my great honour to open the 264<sup>th</sup> academic year of this renowned and historic institution. Since its foundation in 1753, the Accademia Georgofili has been a beacon of learning and teaching in the fields of agriculture, agronomy, forestry, economy, and geography.

The founding objective of the Accademia was to "carry out continuous and well-regulated experiments, and observations, so as to perfect the useful **art of agriculture** in Tuscany". This enlightened attitude continues in the present day, as the high-quality food and drink products of Italy are enjoyed by knowledgeable consumers throughout the world.

My role, as European Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development, is to ensure that the farmers and food producers of Tuscany, and all the regions of Italy, have the right tools and policy supports to continue practicing their art, in this generation and those yet to come.

The CAP ensures that the citizens of Europe have plentiful access to affordable, high quality food, produced to the highest standards in the world.

In addition, through direct support for farmers, as well as through the broader network of supports provided by our rural development policy, the CAP reaches out to all parts of Europe, even the most marginal rural areas.

It is a policy that creates and sustains jobs, economic development and growth in those areas where it is most needed. The CAP is at the heart of a vibrant European agri-food sector, which provides for 44 million jobs, making it the EU's biggest employer.

Beyond this core mission, the CAP has evolved to meet a growing number of societal expectations, and deliver a growing number of public goods.

European farming has adapted to growing demands from society in terms of environmental, human, and animal health standards. Meeting the food and nutrition needs of a planet with more than 9 billion people in 2050, in a sustainable manner, brings many challenges but at the same time offers enormous business opportunities for farmers and the food system.

This is a point I emphasise again and again when I come to Italy. Our farmers are subject to the most demanding production standards in the world. This places them under real pressure, but it also provides them with a precious opportunity.

With the unquestionable **quality** of our products, we are better placed than anyone to meet the food demands of the growing global middle class.

And this is particularly true here in Italy, where your commitment to food quality is as old as the hills of Tuscany.

European farmers and agri-businesses are today extremely competitive on international markets, particularly when it comes to marketing and selling our world-famous origin products.

Here, Italy is "prima inter pares" – you lead the way among European nations when it comes to the number of registered products: 284 food products, 603 wines and 37 spirit drinks.

And I would add that this is not surprising, given the historical commitment of Italian institutions such as the Accademia Georgofili to constant improvement.

I know, for example, that the Academy was heavily involved in the improvement of the technology and variety in Italian wine production in the nineteenth century.

This helped to shape the Italian commitment to quality, which the EU has now elevated to the philosophical heart of our food production system. **And this philosophy is paying off.** Let me illustrate my point with hard statistics:

The annual value of EU agri-food exports reached a new record level of €131 billion in 2016, which is 1.6 % higher than in 2015 and 29% higher than in 2011.

To help our farmers and food businesses take advantage of these opportunities, while also giving them stronger tools to deal with market volatility and price fluctuations, we need to modernise and simplify the policy.

For this reason, the EU Commission recently launched a public consultation on the future of the CAP, which is open to the public until May 2<sup>nd</sup>. I encourage all Italian farmers, academics, as well as rural and urban citizens alike, to make their voices heard.

We have already had over 27,000 responses from across Europe, which is hugely encouraging. The public consultation will form the basis for a Communication on the future of the CAP, which will be published later this year and will outline a range of policy options.

It is therefore imperative that politicians, agri-food stakeholders and rural communities speak up and remind their national governments about the clear value which the CAP brings to all citizens. A well-funded CAP will continue to deliver benefits for all the people of Europe.

We have a golden opportunity to help the CAP make a greater contribution to the Commission's overarching policy priorities of growth and jobs. In this regard, I noted with great interest that the motto of the Accademia Georgofili is "to Increase the Wealth of the State". In my eyes, this is clearly another way of aiming to create growth and jobs.

So I think it is quite clear that the objectives of this institution, just like those of the CAP, are strongly geared towards the public good. The CAP It is a truly European policy; and a truly European triumph of political cooperation over narrow national interests.