

DENMARK: SMALL GAME IN MODERN AGRICULTURE CONFERENCE **27-28 SEPTEMBER**

The Danish Hunters' Association - FACE Member - held the second of two conferences on small game on 27-28 September. The conferences saw national and international experts presenting their professional knowledge and assessment of issues related to management of field game in modern agriculture, exploring the topic from both national and European perspectives with many partners involved.

The discussions were very timely with the CAP reform discussions within the EU. FACE provided the concluding intervention of the conference through a video presentation given by FACE's Secretary-General Angus Middleton, adding an EU-level perspective to the conference.

Due to changes in land use and agricultural intensification, small game - which are heavily reliant on agricultural ecosystems – have declined throughout Europe. This conference provided a unique opportunity to bring together an incredible set of expertise which could produce the potential solutions that will have a great resonance in all of Europe.

At EU level, the Commission had put forward a set of proposals to Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and Rural Development Policy (RDP) which are being debated by the Council and the European Parliament. FACE stressed that the CAP reform proposals contain the important elements that have worked, such as Cross Compliance and Good Agricultural & Environmental Condition Standards (GAEC) as well as some interesting new measures especially in the Greening of direct payments.

Concerning the CAP, FACE would see – apart from the carry-over of good measures such as cross compliance and GAEC – future potential in **securing 3 important elements:**

If hunters could work with **farm advisory services** at national, regional and local levels, incorporating game management options into their advice, the majority of farmers could be reached. This can impact greatly on the way in which environmental aspects that are important for good wildlife management are taken into account. It would also be essential to secure some form and level of **ecological focus areas** as part of the direct payments.



The **European Innovation Partnership** would aim to address probably the two most fundamental challenges faced by European agriculture in the early 21st century: how to increase production & productivity and how to improve sustainability and resource efficiency whilst address environmental issues. FACE emphasised that at this stage, hunting associations and other conservation NGOs should work with farmers and their governments towards a better understanding of which measures may be most applicable and productive to them in terms of delivering food and a healthy environment, and then working together to ensure that these remain as options.

The Danish Hunters' Association presented a model for concrete action - a concrete management concept that can be used nationwide, and based on the successful experience of establishing and running small game management sites, that make a positive difference for partridges and hares.

“It is with pride that I, as Chairman of the Danish Hunters can now say that we have the necessary knowledge to implement optimised small game management. We are now ready to translate our experience into practice in the form of a well-organised management action to be performed on the local government sites of a minimum of 1000-1500 hectares. We expect to establish 100 of these management sites in the country, where local volunteers will provide farmers with an offer to allow local enthusiasts to do the practice of nursing interventions for small game.” says President Claus Lind Christensen.

The 100 management sites are expected to be established over the next 12 months. To some extent this will depend on whether the hunters can obtain external financing to the regional and national coordination of the efforts. Luckily, there is massive support for the project - and therefore the Danish Hunters believe they will succeed.

The Danish Minister of Agriculture and Food Mette Gjerskov, who attended the conference, expressed that the project sounds incredibly exciting. She applauded the focus on small game which the government identifies as the most impoverished wildlife in the Danish countryside. Secondly, Gjerskov conveyed that it is important to see an overall effect of many local initiatives, and thirdly the Minister found it extremely commendable that the Danish Hunters put so much emphasis on the involvement of volunteers.

Angus emphasised the benefits of such cooperations: *“Hunting takes place on some 80-90% of the European land area and in many of those areas, hunting is by one means or*



another organised formally into game management areas or less formally into hunting syndicates. Many of these cover larger areas than the individual farm sizes; they cover multiple primary uses from farming, to forestry, to protected areas.

This offers a much needed coherence and enormous potential to manage our green infrastructure in a much smarter way. If we can work towards better management of Ecological Focus Areas using the European Innovation Partnership as a platform, the potential will be enormous.

We as hunters could deliver these ecological requirements for groups of farmers within our game management areas or shooting syndicates in a coherent manner that will improve the habitat, wildlife and ultimately our hunting - all whilst making sure the farmers receive their direct payments and are left to do what they know best, to farm.”

It is vital to engage and capitalise on these outcomes to maximise the benefits for small game in rural development policy development – a wildlife grouping that is often overlooked. For FACE, the resulting action plan provides essential contributions for EU-level negotiations, and the excellent work done in Denmark by the hunters could be replicated in other European countries.

