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## Press Release

### **AT START OF GREEN WEEK, COPA-COGECA PRESENTS MAJOR EU PROJECTS SHOWING INNOVATION OF AGRICULTURE SECTOR TO IMPROVE WATER MANAGEMENT AND MAINTAIN PRODUCTIVITY**

Copa-Cogeca presented some major projects at a press conference at Green Week today, showcasing the expertise, innovation, constant adaptation, know-how and willingness of the agricultural sector to continuously improve water management in the agricultural sector. Copa-Cogeca Secretary-General Pekka Pesonen highlighted the need to foster agricultural productivity at the same time as lower the impact on water supplies and quality, which is especially important in the wake of growing demand for food, feed, biomass and limited land and water resources. Water is an irreplaceable part of agricultural production, he stressed.

The move came at the start of Green Week “Every drop counts”. Experts at the Conference presented examples of how the interests of farmers can be aligned with sustainable water resource management. Sara Stjernholm, Communications Manager Baltic Deal, Lantbrukarnas Riksförbund (LRF), Sweden, presented an Interreg project the Baltic Deal on farm advice for improved nutrient management in the Baltic Sea region. The project involves farmers and farmers’ advisory organisations around the Baltic Sea and aims to help farmers reduce nutrient losses from farms, whilst maintaining production capacity and competitiveness. She insisted that optimising the use of nutrients is a cost-effective way to enhance farm productivity and brings other benefits to the farm, as well as improving the environment. For the farmer, it can sometimes be quite a challenge to choose the best way of using or handling nutrients on the farm. Advisory services are central to putting best agricultural practices into use. The project is funded by the Baltic Sea Regional Programme 2007–2013 and by the NEFCO/NIB Baltic Sea Action Plan Trust Fund. The total budget reach around 4 million Euros for period 2010 to 2013.

Denis le Chatelier from COOP de France Dehydration presented an initiative to demonstrate the advantages of the protein crop alfalfa which needs little input in terms of fertilizers and plant protection products and covers the soil for several years. « Alfalfa is a very high quality forage with a high protein content. It is cultivated all over Europe mainly in Spain, Italy, France, Germany, Denmark, UK. It is also a very effective water cleansing plant. It is especially effective in the crops specialised regions (where alfalfa is cultivated) and where there is no permanent meadows, few forests and hedges, and no uncultivated area. But unfortunately the surfaces of alfalfa decline year after year due to the removal of specific subsidies for it under the Common Agricultural Policy.

Cristian Maretti, Director of Legacoop, Italy presented a Life project Aqua which aims to innovate the productive processes of the agri-food business sector to reduce water consumption and waste. In particular the project evaluates the international best practices regarding efficient water management and reuse, analyzing and quantifying the benefits in terms of environmental and economic outcomes, defining a water saving kit to spread among companies and engaging the companies of the agri-food sector through the involvement in a panel of experts and through the actual implementation and test of the kit in their systems.

Christian Hick from the Belgian Federation of Walloon Farmers (FWA) presented the Nitrawal initiative which aims to promote water protection measures in agriculture with a particular

focus on nitrate vulnerable zones (NVZ). In order to achieve more sustainable nitrate management specialist advice to farmers, much focus is put on improved knowledge of the nutrient cycle and fertiliser use adapted to the plant needs as well as solutions to use organic fertilisers more effectively.

On the issue of drought, Mr Pesonen went on to explain how Spain and Portugal's cereal crops have been particularly hard hit this year, as a result of drought, with losses of up to 26%. He pointed out that the main problem for southern countries is how to retain and save water which has fallen in the winter months and transfer it to Spring or late Autumn. Investment in water retention systems is vital. Parts of Central and Eastern Europe have also been affected by Spring drought, which is becoming increasingly frequent, and making farmers less willing to sow Spring barley. Plants which are resilient to drought during the early stages of vegetation are consequently vital, he said. Spring drought has also affected the livestock sector and there is a need to improve the flexibility of permanent and temporary grassland in the future.

Wrapping up, Mr Pesonen said that in view of the ongoing discussions on the future CAP and in particular the strong focus given to environmental aspects (including the greening) it is of outmost importance to look at workable and cost-effective solutions for improved water management in agriculture. Copa-Cogeca believes that there is a clear need for measures to encourage green growth, namely to integrate environmental protection and the production process in a way which maintains production capacity and contributes to efficient and productive water use. There is also a need for financial support in order to boost agricultural productivity whilst using water wisely at EU and national level

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