

French farmers and researchers' groups talk to Australians

On September 13, the French Embassy, through its Counsellor on Agricultural Affairs, organized a hybrid event aimed at promoting to Australian counterparts the approaches of farmers' groups in France, as drivers for achieving sustainability targets: reducing the use of inputs, improving soil health, taking better account of animal welfare, improving resilience through value adding.



Figure 1 Counsellor on Agricultural Affairs, Vincent Hebrail

The event, held both at the Residence of France and virtually, was opened by the French and EU Ambassadors to Australia.

After a presentation by the French Ministry of Agriculture on the DEPHY, 30 000 and GIEE farm networks, four farmers' groups took the floor to testify successively on their projects and results :

- Reducing phytosanitary products in vineyards (Pays de la Loire)
- Conservation agriculture in mixed crop-livestock farming in an oceanic climate (Normandy)
- Improving animal welfare and farmer well-being (Brittany)
- Adding value to milk through agroecological practices and the creation of a collective cheese dairy processing unit (Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes).

They presented their practices with a passion and professionalism that were highly convincing to the Australian audience, which included representatives from the federal government, the State of Victoria, research, the farming industry and the agency against cruelty to animals.

INRAe then gave an overview of the state of research on the subject, highlighting indicators (including the treatment frequency index), data collection and the scientific and statistical methodologies supporting the analysis of such approaches. This was of particular interest to Australian counterparts, who wished similar work were going on in Australia.

Finally, before a question-and-answer session, the organization Agrifutures Australia took the floor to describe the Australian agricultural sector's sustainability approach, and in particular its goal of net emissions neutrality by 2030.



Figure 2 Ambassador of France to Australia ,



Figure 3 Ambassador of the European Union to Australia

While a cocktail party closed the event at the Residence of France, allowing for less formal exchanges, questions from participants, both online and in attendance, focused on key points. These included the feasibility of European Green Deal objectives, in relation to Common Agricultural Policy subsidies; digital technologies (Optidose in viticulture) used by French farmers; and the state of development of organic farming in France.

All in all, the event highlighted the French agroecological approach, supported by a high-level, collaborative research effort, as well as the French conviction in the necessity and achievability of the sustainability objectives set by France and the EU.

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