Excerpt FCS Yearbook 2025 – Perspective

The year 2025 has confirmed that Europe's countryside has entered a phase in which policy implementation matters more than policy ambition alone. Following the European elections and the beginning of a new institutional cycle, the focus has increasingly shifted from strategic declarations towards the concrete application of legislation affecting land use, agriculture, forestry and nature management.

Throughout the year, landowners, farmers and rural entrepreneurs have faced the practical consequences of policies developed during previous legislative cycles. Discussions on the future direction of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), the implementation of the Nature Restoration Law and ongoing regulatory requirements in areas such as forestry, biodiversity and climate policy have highlighted the growing complexity of the operating environment for land-based activities.

A recurring challenge in 2025 has been the gap between policy objectives and implementation realities. While environmental and climate goals continue to enjoy broad support, their delivery has often been accompanied by uncertainty regarding timelines, obligations and economic implications. This has reinforced the importance of legal clarity, proportionality and realistic implementation pathways, particularly for private landowners who are expected to deliver long-term environmental outcomes.

Friends of the Countryside has consistently emphasised that sustainable results depend on active land management and the meaningful involvement of those directly responsible for managing land. Experience throughout 2025 has once again demonstrated that voluntary engagement, trust and workable incentive structures are essential to achieving policy objectives, while overly prescriptive approaches risk undermining both effectiveness and acceptance.

At European level, renewed attention to stakeholder dialogue and governance has created opportunities for more constructive exchanges between decision-makers and land managers. Friends of the Countryside has remained actively engaged in these discussions, contributing practical expertise and advocating for policies that recognise the diversity of land ownership structures and management systems across Europe.

As the policy agenda continues to evolve, Friends of the Countryside remains committed to supporting responsible land stewardship, fostering dialogue and ensuring that rural perspectives are fully integrated into decision-making processes.

Throughout 2025, Friends of the Countryside has continued to function above all as a closely connected family business network, bringing together landowners, land managers and rural

entrepreneurs across Europe. Beyond individual projects and policy files, this network remains central to ensuring that those directly responsible for land management are effectively represented and heard at European level.

In this context, particular importance is attached to intergenerational continuity and the active involvement of the next generation. Through the Young Friends of the Countryside, the network provides a framework for younger landowners and land managers to engage, learn and progressively take on responsibilities, while benefiting from the experience and knowledge of previous generations. Supporting this exchange is essential to ensuring continuity, strengthening long-term stewardship and enabling young professionals to grow into the network as active and committed members.

Looking ahead to 2026, trade policy developments, including ongoing discussions around the EU–Mercosur agreement, will further underline the importance of coherence between environmental ambition, competitiveness and enforceable standards.

Friends of the Countryside will continue to contribute to these debates in a constructive and responsible manner, supporting approaches that ensure fair competition, reciprocity of standards and legal certainty, while safeguarding the long-term viability of European land-based activities.

By providing a platform for exchange, coordination and collective representation, Friends of the Countryside enables its members to engage constructively with European institutions and decision-makers. At a time when regulatory complexity and expectations towards land-based activities continue to increase, this role as a stable point of reference and trusted interlocutor remains essential.

This publication brings together our members, initiatives and perspectives, reflecting the strength of a network built on long-term commitment, shared responsibility and active engagement in shaping policies affecting Europe’s countryside.

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