



PRESS RELEASE

EACB CEO Nina Schindler Highlights Cooperative Banks' Role in Supporting a Sustainable Agricultural sector

Brussels, February 18, 2025 – Nina Schindler, CEO of the European Association of Co-operative Banks (EACB), participated in the *Food Drink Dialogues* panel discussion on the agricultural sector's transition toward sustainability.

The event, organised by FoodDrinkEurope in partnership with the Financial Times, brought together key players across the food value chain to discuss the various challenges facing the sector and possible solutions from an EU policy perspective.

Ms Schindler, having participated in the EU's Strategic Dialogue on the Future of Agriculture and currently sitting on the new European Board on Agri-Food, was well placed to bring the perspective of the EU financial sector.

She first highlighted the long-standing involvement of cooperative banks, as historical partners, in financing the agrifood sector; outlined the challenges farmers face as they work toward more sustainable practices, and called for regulatory tweaks to help cooperative banks in supporting their clients' ESG transition, via a simple framework that does not create unnecessary burden.

Unlocking and leveraging private capital to support transition and resilience

"We, as cooperative banks, are risk managers", Schindler explained. "We provide access to lending facilities for farmers to invest in sustainable practices and improve their long-term profitability, but we must assess the individual risks of each project including ESG risks and transition pathways."

To address current investment gaps, Ms Schindler insisted on the importance of a holistic and consistent policy approach. The banking sector also needs to rely on benchmarks and reliable data when assessing the progress of farmers on their transition pathways, as set out in the recommendations from the EU Commission's Strategic Dialogue on Agriculture. The Commission should establish these mechanisms, without additional red tape or excessive administrative requirements for farmers.

Blended finance and cooperation between public and private institutions must also be stepped up to address riskier and larger-scale projects, and bridge the current investment gap.

Looking Forward: Expectations for the EBAF and Commission

As the agricultural sector continues to navigate its sustainability journey, Ms Schindler highlighted the EACB's high expectations for the new European Board on Agri-Food (EBAF). *"We look forward to our continued collaboration with regulators and stakeholders along the food chain, so that EU regulatory frameworks provide the clarity and incentives needed to support green transition in agriculture"*.

The voice of 2.400 local and retail banks, 90 million members, 227 million customers in Europe

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The Cooperative Difference: Sustainability, Proximity, Governance

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About the EACB:

The European Association of Co-operative Banks ([EACB](https://www.eacb.coop)) is the voice of the cooperative banks in Europe. It represents, promotes and defends the common interests of its 27 member institutions and of cooperative banks in general. Cooperative banks form decentralised networks which are subject to banking as well as cooperative legislation. Democracy, transparency and proximity are the three key characteristics of the cooperative banks' business model. With 2,400 locally operating banks and 36,200 outlets co-operative banks are widely represented throughout the enlarged European Union, playing a major role in the financial and economic system. They have a long tradition in serving 227 million customers, mainly consumers, retailers and communities. The co-operative banks in Europe represent 90 million members and 732,000 employees and have a total average market share of about 20%.

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