

ACTIVITY REPORT

2023

"In 2023, the European political landscape was marked by polarisation, surprising election results, and reassessments of policies. The EU Green Deal has significantly impacted land managers and already well before Vice President Timmermans' departure, tensions had heightened among key targets and proposals, particularly regarding Biodiversity and Farm to Fork strategies. This scenario was not entirely unforeseen. The European Landowners' Organization (ELO) had previously highlighted the potential consequences of hastily incorporating ambitious targets for land protection and pesticide reductions while dismissing the concerns of those responsible for implementation. We hope those in charge will learn lessons from this challenging year."

Thierry de l'Escaille - ELO Executive President





AGRICULTURE & FOOD SYSTEMS

In 2023, discussions surrounding the **Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)** took on a national tone, following the recent implementation of the reformed CAP in January. Although a midterm review is not anticipated, conversations about its future have arisen, emphasising the promotion of viable farming, sound management of natural resources, and balanced territorial development. Amidst persistent budgetary pressures, high expectations, and concerns about enlargement, navigating a future reform is more challenging than ever.

While the CAP regulates European farmland, a new proposal for a **soil health law** downplays its role. Nevertheless, ELO appreciates the emphasis on gaining knowledge through soil sampling, a vital source for well-designed and cost-effective resilience, which is the part of the directive that requires the most reconsideration. ELO will cautiously monitor negotiations and advocate for enhancements.



ADVANCEMENTS AND SETBACKS : AGRICULTURE POLICY HIGHLIGHTS

In 2023, the **Farm to Fork Strategy** underwent notable developments and challenges. The regulation on **New Genomic Techniques (NGTs)** emerged in July as a pivotal legislative proposal with the potential to foster innovation and expand farmer's tools for climate change mitigation. ELO staunchly supports its swift adoption to facilitate farmers' access to innovation. Conversely, the **Sustainable Use Regulation (SUR)** encountered hurdles, facing a rare rejection by the European Parliament. The proposal was sent back to the Commission due to unreasonable demands.

Additionally, the year concluded with the European executive introducing a new animal welfare package, including potentially worrisome requirements for live animal transport, including for export.

Despite expectations, the eagerly awaited framework on Sustainable Food Systems remained unreleased, despite calls for its publication. Looking forward to 2024, ELO remains dedicated to presenting compelling arguments to support landowners and rural entrepreneurs.

Collaborating with diverse stakeholders, the organisation aims to persist in promoting a thriving countryside and addressing challenges encountered by the agricultural community.



FORESTS

Current discussions over EU forests and the forest sector are often contradictory. On the one side, the **Green Deal objectives** for decarbonisation of the economy and green growth imply stronger investments into renewables and a bioeconomy. However, most of the forest-related proposals coming from this Commission were anchored in the Biodiversity strategy and thus taking a “protection” flare.

Recent proposals focus both on **increasing the forest area being protected**, strictly protected and in “no-go areas”, and on restricting management and leading to further bureaucracy on the existing Sustainable Forest management structures and certifications.

From the pledges on protection and on nature restoration, to the guidelines that provide operational elements to (1) support afforestation, reforestation and tree planting, to (2) identify, map and protect primary and old-growth forests, and to (3) implement closer-to-nature forestry, to the review of renewable energy directive, and the new law on deforestation, all these are examples of European influence on a sector that should, for the most part, be under national competence.

This becomes particularly problematic when looking at the increasing risk of forest disturbances arising from climate change that require more management to ensure that we maintain our forests in the future.

Action is even more urgent if we consider the long term cycles of forests, that require a more than 60 years time frame for implementation.



In 2024, despite the limitations imposed by the European elections, we expect further discussion on the latest proposal that sets a framework for forest monitoring in the EU, which intends to make better use of Copernicus on new digitisation tools but dismisses exciting monitoring structure while not providing many details on the data collection, treatment, interpretation, validation structures, and corrective mechanism that are the backbone of the proposal.



BIODIVERSITY

The **2030 Biodiversity Strategy** gained momentum this year with the introduction of the **Nature Restoration Law**, propelling the land manager community into action to enhance the proposal towards a more practical, field-based approach. Certainly, short-term quantitative targets should not be an end unto themselves; significant qualitative improvements should be pursued. ELO recognises that social and economic considerations are vital prerequisites. Ensuring viable business models is central to any long-term conservation strategy.

Our team actively engaged in European Commission expert groups and European Parliament bilateral meetings, advocating the pivotal role of private land conservation in advancing EU strategy targets. Over the years, we have identified a set of tools benefiting both conservation organisations and individual landowners in Europe. It is imperative that the potential of those tools is fully embraced after the 2024 EU elections.

As Member States submit pledges for new protected areas in line with EU protection targets, land managers express concerns about potential impacts, particularly under designations such as Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs). We appreciate the European Commission's recent focus on biodiversity financing, a crucial area of concern for ELO, along with active participation in shaping future Nature Restoration Plans.



CLIMATE

While progress remains slow and our economies still depend primarily on fossil fuels, we believe that more must be done to support those who can contribute to the EU's decarbonisation agenda and a stronger bioeconomy, namely EU landowners. Initiatives such as the "**Carbon Removals Certification Framework**" have the potential to advance these goals if carefully designed. While ELO actively participates as a member in the relevant expert group, concerns persist regarding the quality criteria associated with this proposal, which could undermine the carbon market for land-based sectors prematurely, posing a risk to the ambitious carbon sequestration target outlined in the **LULUCF regulation**.

Another crucial facet of climate discussions pertains to both direct and indirect impacts of climate change on our rural areas. These extreme outbursts significantly affect land management, impacting the capacity to sequester and store carbon. Unfortunately, this is an area frequently featured in the news but often lacking in effective policy proposals, with the CAP urged to address these gaps.

In 2024, the Commission will scrutinise climate targets for 2040 and explore methods to price agricultural emissions. We hope for a favourable resolution of the carbon farming file.





LAND ACCESS AND PROPERTY RIGHTS

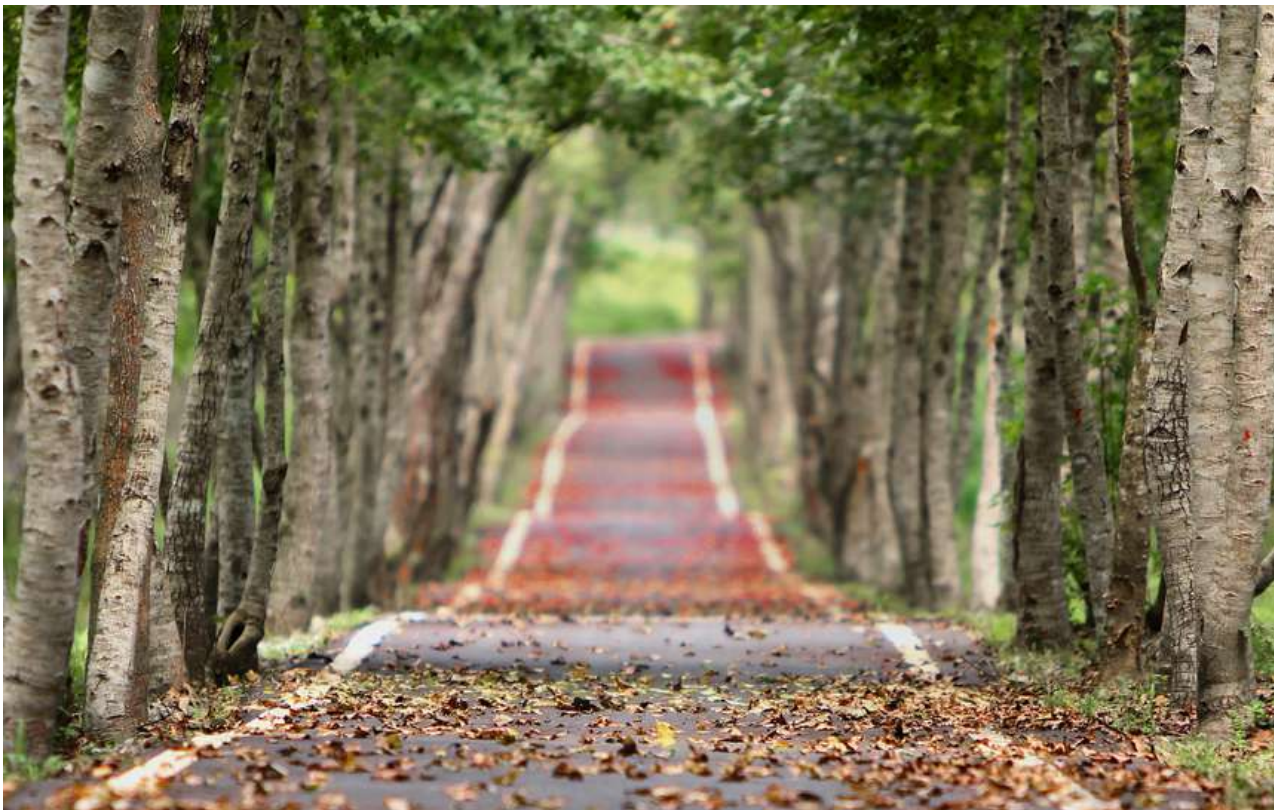
ELO staunchly advocates for the application of free movement of people, goods, services, and capital across all Member States. Property rights have been and continue to be a cornerstone of ELO activities since its inception.

Land law plays a crucial role in facilitating the capitalisation of the rural economy by the private sector rather than the state. With 27 different national frameworks, caution is essential to avoid overregulating the market.

Ensuring access to land applies not only to existing landowners and farmers, but also to future ones. ELO believes that adhering to the rule of law is the key to ensuring well-functioning land and forestry markets, vital for a sustainable and profitable European countryside.

In 2023, our focus remained on diverse themes such as **taxation, inheritance, land tenure contracts, and infrastructure development.**

ELO actively advocated for the rights of our members, ensuring a diverse and multifunctional rural economy and access to basic services while preserving jobs in the sector. This commitment allows us to provide our members with the right information and tools to confront numerous challenges, ensuring that their basic rights are respected.



COLLABORATION

ELO has a strong partnership with the EU Institutions resulting in a close collaboration through a number of initiatives such as the European Parliament's Intergroup and the "EU Platform on Coexistence between People and Large Carnivores".

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT'S INTERGROUP ON "BIODIVERSITY, HUNTING, COUNTRYSIDE"

In 2023, the Intergroup on "**Biodiversity, Hunting, and Countryside**" served as a vital platform for dialogue between Members of the European Parliament and rural stakeholders, addressing key issues on the EU policy agenda.

ELO organised a "Satellite Use for Green Transition Monitoring" webinar. Satellite data is a pivotal tool for biodiversity conservation and management. Another topical event involved ELO's discussion on the Soil Monitoring Law. This meeting proved timely as the issue entered interinstitutional negotiations.



THE EU PLATFORM ON COEXISTENCE BETWEEN PEOPLE AND LARGE CARNIVORES

As the co-chair of the EU Platform, ELO co-animated regional workshops in France (Vercors) and Belgium (High Fens), highlighting local initiatives solving conflicts arising from the return of large carnivores in Europe.



ELO, as the co-chair of the European Large Carnivores Platform, serves as the link between this project and the broader European initiative. The Platform's annual plenary meeting on June 8, 2023, provided an opportunity to discuss pressing issues at the EU level, including livestock depredation, financing prevention measures, and the legal implications of potential changes to the large carnivores' statutes in the Bern Convention.

NETWORK

ELO is part of a vibrant ecosystem of partner organisations, sharing our ideal of a thriving countryside in one or several aspects. **What binds us together in 2023?**

We offer unique insights across the expansive landscape of rural life.

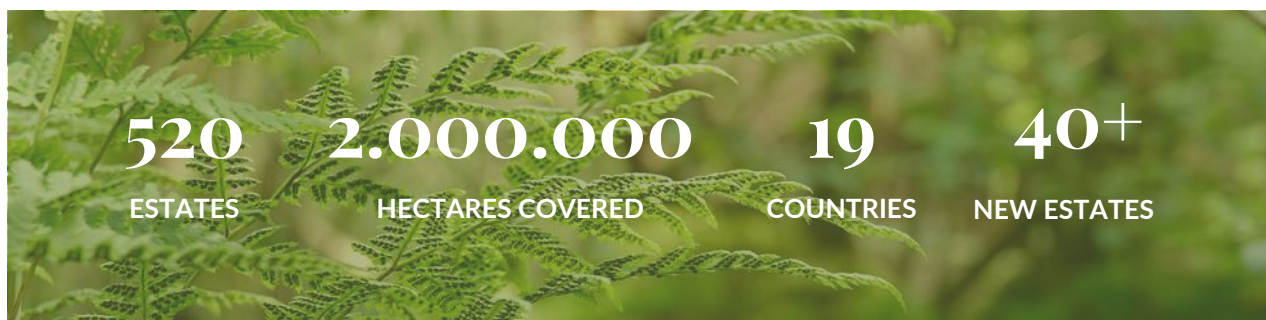




WILDLIFE ESTATES

THE LARGEST PRIVATE INITIATIVE FOR BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION

Since 2004, Wildlife Estates (WE) has been recognising outstanding biodiversity management on estates throughout Europe. With more than 520 estates in 19 countries and covering over 2 million hectares, the Wildlife Estates project continues to grow steadily. In 2023, more than 40 estates were incorporated into our label. These territories, voluntarily embracing the WE philosophy, underscore the essential integration of local human development and sustainable land use within a unified project, even in protected areas.



© Alan Phillips, Scherpenbergen - De Hutten owner, Belgium.

The Annual Conference took place in Edinburgh, with representatives from 11 member countries, along with officials from the Scottish Government, gathered to discuss the label's progress, exchange knowledge on policy opportunities, and explore the work underway.



Delegates had the opportunity to visit the impressive Bavelaw Estate in the Pentland Hills and the Hopetoun Estate, two exemplary instances of innovative conservation projects in Scotland.

Looking ahead, the next annual meeting is scheduled to be held in the Netherlands, within the national park De Hoge Veluwe which comprises 5,400 hectares of woodland, heathland, sands & peat bogs.

LEARN MORE 

AWARDS

THE EUROPEAN BEE AWARD



The European Bee Award has been acknowledging projects of great commitment to enhance pollinators' well-being and **bee-friendly farming** practices since it was established in 2014 by **ELO** and the European Agricultural Machinery Industry Association (CEMA).

With a ceremony held at the **European Parliament** and hosted by **MEP Franc Bogovič**, the spotlight shone on the deserving winners.

A scalable model for pollinators' habitat restoration and recreation (**LIFE PollinACTION**) stood out, showcasing an exemplary approach. Additionally, a novel peptide bioinsecticide (**SPEAR® Bioinsecticide**) was celebrated for its innovative contribution to sustainable farming practices.



THE LAND AND SOIL MANAGEMENT

The Land and Soil Management award has been granted annually since 2008 to a project contributing and serving as a role model for soil protection. In 2023, the winner was **Klompe Landbouw** from the Soil Heroes Foundation, in the Netherlands, for their project dedicated to improving soil health through experimental regenerative agriculture practices.



THE EUROPEAN TREE OF THE YEAR

The European Tree of the Year award emphasises the crucial role of trees in both the natural and cultural heritage of Europe, highlighting the invaluable ecosystem services they contribute. The winning tree of 2023 is the majestic **Oak Fabrykant** from Łódź, Poland.



EVENTS HIGHLIGHTS

ELO events cover a whole range of agriculturally related topics whether workshops, conferences, webinars, dinners, and field visits.

FORUM FOR THE FUTURE OF AGRICULTURE

The Forum for the Future of Agriculture (ForumforAg) is the premiere meeting place in Belgium to debate **sustainable agriculture and environmental challenges**, and one of the leading international forums committed to help build a more resilient, sustainable, climate-smart and nature positive food and agriculture system.



Founding partners



Strategic and International partners



Supporting partners



Founded by ELO and Syngenta in 2008, the Forum is where agriculture and environment meet for an open dialogue at our **Annual Conference** each March and in other events throughout the year, including **Regional Forums**, **thematic workshops**, **diners**, **podcasts**, **articles** and **summaries**. Today, the Forum's growing network comprises over **15,000 people** in **nearly 40 countries** and **five continents**. Its Chairman is **Janez Potočnik**, former European Commissioner for the Environment, President of the RISE Foundation and Co-president of UNEP.



ANNUAL CONFERENCE IN BRUSSELS



REGIONAL EVENT IN SPAIN



RETHINKING ARABLE FARMING

The Agronomy of climate smart farming to deliver on the EU Green Deal. Organised by ELO with Bayer, Yara, and Netafim, the event addressed climate change in agriculture, exploring climate-smart farming practices crucial for the EU Green Deal.



May



Brussels & online



500



EUROPEAN BIODIVERSITY CONFERENCE

Dedicated to the issue of invasive species management and how to protect Europe's ecosystems, the conference identified areas for enhancement and promoted collaboration across sectors to better equip land managers, farmers, and foresters with essential skills.



Novembre



Brussels



136



ELO GENERAL ASSEMBLY IN SPAIN

Special attention was given to the Nature Restoration Law as it was reaching a tipping point in the European Parliament's legislative process. After intense discussion, members agreed on a common position and on a clear strategy to continue to help improve the regulation. Thierry de l'Escaille was unanimously elected as ELO Executive President, with Jurgen Tack appointed as ELO Secretary General.



June



Madrid



53



ELO GENERAL ASSEMBLY IN BELGIUM

Special attention was given to the difficult negotiations over some of the green deal proposals, namely those linked to the Farm to Fork and Biodiversity strategies. This was highlighted by MEP Martin Hlaváček (Renew, CZ), who also addressed the state of play over the carbon removal framework report that he was leading.



Novembre



Brussels



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ELO EVENTS IN 2023

● FEBRUARY & MARCH

16/02	ELO European Policy Group,
15/03	European Parliament meeting on Carbon Farming
21/03	<u>European Tree of the Year Award Ceremony</u>
27/03	ForumforAg - <u>Unlocking innovation</u>
27/03	ForumforAg - <u>How to set credits for ecosystem services on the international market?</u>
27/03	ForumforAg - <u>Innovation for the future of forests</u>
28/03	ForumforAg Annual Conference
28/03	<u>The Land and Soil Management Ceremony Award</u>
29/03	ForumforAg - Transatlantic Global Forum

● APRIL & MAY

24-27/04	ForumforAg - Solution and Policy Week
25/04	ELO Working Group on carbon removals
28/04	ELO European Policy Group
02/05	<u>Intergroup on "Satellite Use for Green Transition Monitoring"</u>
04/05	<u>Arable Farming in a Changing Climate</u>
23/05	<u>HERIT final conference</u>
31/05	<u>ForumforAg Regional Spain</u>

● JUNE, JULY & SEPTEMBER

1/06	<u>ELO General Assembly</u>
28/06	ELO/Indigo Dinner on Carbon Farming
05/07	<u>Intergroup on "the Co-existence of livestock farming and large carnivores in Europe"</u>
July	3 roundtables on Regenerative Agriculture
05-07/09	<u>Wildlife Estates Meeting</u>
20/09	ForumforAg - <u>Funding the Transition Workshop</u>
27/09	<u>ALL-Ready Final Conference</u>

● OCTOBER & NOVEMBER

10/10	<u>Intergroup on "EU Agricultural Soils: Advancing Conservation, Regenerative Agriculture & Soil Health"</u>
23/10	ELO European Policy Group
27/10	ForumforAg - <u>International workshop on advancing agricultural sustainability & trade</u>
27/11	ELO European Policy Group
28/11	ELO General Assembly
28/11	<u>European Biodiversity conference</u>
28/11	<u>European Bee Award Ceremony</u>
29/11	ForumforAg - Future of Agriculture in Ukraine

COUNTRYSIDE MAGAZINE

With a readership exceeding 15,000, including policymakers, academics, ELO members, and enthusiasts of rural areas worldwide, the CountrySide Magazine fuels impactful discourse.

Published bi-monthly in English and French, this 16-page printed edition is a rallying point for the voices of land managers and rural entrepreneurs. It ensures their perspectives resonate and influence decisions at every stage.

For inquiries, please reach out to: media@elo.org.



LEARN MORE 

PROJECTS

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In 2023, ELO took part in 27 impactful projects spanning diverse fields, including agricultural policy, biodiversity strategies, climate change mitigation, cultural heritage preservation, land conservation, and community building.

EUROPEAN NETWORKS FOR PRIVATE LAND CONSERVATION (ENPLC)



In 2023, ENPLC fostered collaborative efforts between individual landowners and conservationists, promoting the voluntary protection of private land for the benefit of nature and climate. The year was bustling with numerous reports and events at local, regional, national, and European levels.

ENPLC contributed to crucial topics such as carbon and biodiversity credits, cross-boundary tax benefits, marketing products from nature estates, exploring easements and land stewardship agreements, and involving volunteers in conservation and monitoring efforts on private land. Beyond knowledge sharing, the network actively participated in European policy discussions, advocating for the recognition of voluntary private land conservation.



DIGITAF

In 2023, DigitAF surveyed the land managers from its living labs across the Czech Republic, Finland, the Netherlands, Germany, Italy, and the UK, evaluating their experiences with agroforestry practices and the efficacy of digital tools in measuring impact. The project also analysed CAP strategic plans, specifically assessing subsidies for trees outside forests and landscape features, with resulting policy briefs available on DigitAF's website.



SOILVALUES

2023 was the starting point of SoilValues, a year dedicated to project introduction and stakeholder engagement. Strong ties were formed with sister projects Novasoil and InBestSoil. Focus extended to selecting testing grounds, understanding their data needs, and initiating discussions on soil health business models. The business model canvas and implementation plan were presented to the testing grounds.



ELO WAS ALSO INVOLVED IN THE FOLLOWING 24 PROJECTS IN 2023





67

MEMBERS
ORGANIZATIONS



5800

EVENT
PARTICIPANTS



54

EVENTS
ORGANISED



27

ACTIVE
PROJECTS



8

AWARDS &
LABELS



32

TEAM
MEMBERS

"We are living in challenging times, where intelligent leadership is needed more than ever. 2024 is a pivotal year for Europe to elect its future leaders, whose decisions will significantly impact our well-being. Political commitment to property rights has been proven to have a direct positive impact on economic growth. Economic growth, in turn, forms the foundation for the willingness to address environmental issues. As ambassadors for rural entrepreneurs in Europe, the European Landowners' Organization plays a pivotal role in developing policies related to economic, social, and ecological development. 2024 will be a busy year!"

Jurgen Tack - ELO Secretary General



The European Landowners' Organization (ELO) is a unique federation of associations from Europe, dedicated to representing the interests of landowners, land managers, and rural entrepreneurs.



European
Landowners'
Organization

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