Good policy needs to survive contact with reality



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Innovators by Nature returns to Brussels for its second edition. What is the idea behind this event? Dialogue with Dr. Jurgen TACK, Secretary General of ELO, ahead of Innovators by Nature 2026

Jurgen Tack: Europe has no shortage of ambition. We have strategies for biodiversity, climate, agriculture, forests and rural areas. The real challenge is turning those ambitions into something that works on the ground.

That is where *Innovators by Nature* starts. Rather than treating implementation as the final stage of the discussion, we need to consider it from the beginning.

For landowners, farmers and foresters, this is also about resilience. How can we manage land sustainably while keeping businesses economically viable? How can we diversify income through tourism, ecosystem services, nature markets, bio-based activities or new technologies? And who are the entrepreneurs, investors and partners able to help make those ideas happen?

The event is about connecting those worlds.



Why is that connection so important today?

JT: Because policy increasingly has very real consequences for people managing land. Once legislation leaves Brussels, practical questions appear: Who implements it? What does it cost? What incentives exist? What data or technology is needed? Is there a viable business model?

These are not secondary details. They determine whether a policy succeeds. Landowners, farmers and foresters have a very particular perspective because they are making decisions about land over decades, not over the length of a legislative cycle. They understand the complexity of combining food production, biodiversity, climate adaptation, forestry, water management and economic viability within the same landscape.

That experience needs to be part of the conversation much earlier.

Does innovation need more than data and technology?

JT: Absolutely. Europe should be ambitious about environmental outcomes, but we should avoid assuming that there is one prescribed route to achieve them everywhere. A farmer in Spain, a forest owner in Finland and a land manager in Belgium operate in completely different conditions.

What matters is giving people enough freedom to find solutions that work in their circumstances.

Innovation happens when there is space to adapt.

Where does business fit into that picture?

JT: It is essential. Nature-positive management cannot rely indefinitely on goodwill or public funding alone.

If we expect land managers to deliver biodiversity, carbon sequestration, water management or other ecosystem services, we also need credible economic models behind those outcomes.

That is why *Innovators by Nature* brings together land managers with entrepreneurs, investors, technology providers and financial actors. There are many promising ideas emerging around natural capital, biodiversity, sustainable agriculture and forestry. But an innovation only becomes meaningful when somebody can actually use it.

This event has the ability to create those critical connections.

What can policymakers gain from attending?

JT: They can identify the difference between a theoretical solution and an operational one.

A policy document can define an objective very clearly. A land manager will immediately ask: what does this mean for my farm, my forest, my investment decisions or my employees? What happens during a drought? What happens when various environmental objectives compete on the same hectare?

Those questions are not resistance to change. They are part of designing better policy.

That is why we need a stronger feedback loop between those writing legislation and those implementing it. Good policy should survive contact with reality.

Who should come to Innovators by Nature?

JT: Anyone interested in turning Europe's environmental and rural ambitions into practical results.

Of course, landowners, farmers and foresters. But also policymakers, entrepreneurs, researchers, investors, environmental organisations, technology companies and financial institutions.

The value comes from having these people in the same room. A landowner may discover a new source of income; an investor may find a solution with potential to scale. A policymaker may better understand where regulation helps — or unintentionally gets in the way.

That is why I see *Innovators by Nature* as more than a traditional conference. It is a marketplace for ideas, solutions and partnerships.

What would make the 2026 edition a success for you?

JT: If people leave with new partnerships, new ideas and a better understanding of what is happening outside their own sector, that is already a success.

Land managers should not feel that they are simply recipients of European policy. They are part of delivering Europe's objectives — and should help shape how those objectives are achieved.

There is great expertise, entrepreneurship and innovation in Europe's countryside that Brussels needs to hear. *Innovators by Nature* is about bringing the people that manage Europe's land and the businesses developing new solutions directly into the conversation so that ambition, innovation and legislation are connected to what can actually be achieved on the ground.

Register here:
elo.org/events/innovators-by-nature-2026/



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Dr. Jurgen TACK speaking at Innovators by Nature 2025