

NRR Workshop at the European Parliament (11/11/2015)

On the 11th of November, the RISE Foundation held a workshop on Nutrient Recovery and Recycling at the European Parliament hosted by Paolo de Castro (MEP). Held as part of its current study of nutrient recovery and recycling in Europe, the event brought together Members of Parliament with academics and practitioners in order to examine both the challenges and opportunities of these vital technologies.



Developed and developing in order to reduce our need for linear production models in agriculture, with the accompanying waste and pollution issues, and turn towards an economy of recycling and reuse, this concept is most timely in the face of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, the EC's Circular Economy Package, and the global push for combatting climate change.



Opening the event, MEP Giovanni la Via stated the importance of obliging polluters to pay for the costs of externalities, which would help drive the way forward and force economic actors to better consider linear production models. Furthermore, he also suggested the pricing-in of externalities in food production, costs that are currently born in the form of environmental degradation.

Following the opening, study director Allan Buckwell outlined some of the initial conclusions of the report, noting that problem was not (yet) the finiteness of natural resources such as phosphorus rock, but rather the current linear use models. While nutrient recovery and reuse projects can certainly help alleviate mineral fertilizer use, their displacement with recycled products will not occur overnight.

At many points, said Prof Buckwell, more integrated action in the food and waste value chain actions are needed in order to stimulate the uptake of nutrient recovery and recycling. Among these, according to several of the following speakers, is the need to reconfigure the (non) pricing-in of externalities such as pollution, both for the polluters themselves but also for the final consumers.



Another central issue is the question of how to integrate NRR projects as part of a viable, self-sufficient countryside economy. Many speakers and guests noted that it would be unwise for NRR installations to be over-reliant on subsidies, as this would demonstrate their inability to stand on their own. Furthermore, the nature of manure (with its high weight and water content) demands that local, small-scale plants would need to be created in order to fully utilize the potential of these projects. While the implementation of such plants is already viable in some places, full adaptation would depend on both the production of

immediately useable products that are price-wise competitive with currently available mineral products.

Public procurement could be one of the keys towards creating a framework that support NRR; with a high degree of service acquisition coming from Member States, a case could be made for using such channels in order to support NRR projects, or at least demanding full production chain responsibility of its contractors.

Ultimately, while there are still technical and societal issues to overcome in the field of nutrient recycling and recovery, the future of these projects in the face of an overwhelming need to reduce pressures on production chains and the environment ensure that there will be a much-needed future for nutrient recovery and recycling projects.



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