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EUROPEAN AND ITALIAN AGRICULTURE: COMPETITIVENESS, CLIMATE RESILIENCE, AND "SCALABLE" INNOVATION

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European agriculture is entering a transformation phase, with moderately growing productivity, increasing climate pressure and a reorientation towards more sustainable systems, and structural changes (reduction in the number of farms and livestock). The great challenge will be to maintain self-sufficiency and added value, accompanying a transition that is technological, but also economic and social. Agriculture and the processing industry in Italy have reached a share of 17.4 per cent of the EU's added value in 2024, ranking first.

Drivers and challenges: productivity with less input, profitability, and territorial cohesion

Five driving forces guide the agenda: EU policy and governance (CAP, Green Deal, Farm to Fork, just to name the main ones), climate crisis (extreme events have an estimated cost of €28 billion per year for EU producers), scientific and technological innovation, transformation of production systems, markets and geopolitics. Hence, five challenges: increasing productivity by reducing inputs/impacts, adapting crops and livestock to climate stress, reducing environmental footprint while maintaining profitability, safeguarding quality/safety/value, preserving territorial cohesion and socio-economic sustainability.

Innovation as a laboratory for resilience and competitiveness

On strategic supply chains, innovation can become a "laboratory" of resilience and competitiveness. For example, for tomatoes, the integration of advanced genetics, sensors and AI (irrigation/nutrition decisions), data-driven traceability (blockchain) and integrated solutions (precision irrigation, cover crops) is indicated as a concrete trajectory. For durum wheat, without accelerating varietal innovation and precision agriculture, the risk of import dependency and loss of competitiveness of the cereal supply chain increases.

Shared priorities for public decisions and corporate strategies

The discussion can close on a few operational priorities: stable and simplified policies (CAP oriented towards innovation, resilience, and sustainability); investments in "systemic" R&I (digitalisation, genetics, new technologies) with companies able to adopt and scale up; territories and innovation clusters as local experimentation infrastructures; training and managerial skills for agriculture 4.0.

The objective is to implement measures that make innovation accessible, scalable, and systemic, preventing transition and compliance from resulting solely in selection and loss of the productive base.