

### **39. TRADITIONAL CONSULTATION OF THE PUBLIC AGRICULTURAL ADVISORY SERVICE**

The Chamber of Agriculture and Forestry of Slovenia (CAFS) and the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food (MAFF) organised a consultation of the Public Agricultural Advisory Service (PAAS) and an event of the European Innovation Partnership (EIP) in Bled, entitled »Soil, our irreplaceable resource«. The event took place over two days on 18 and 19 November 2024.

During the event, many interesting and useful topics were presented, ranging from the presentation of the EU Mission "A Soil Deal for Europe", the European Research Programme on Agricultural Soil Quality, the importance of agricultural land protection to ensure food security in Slovenia, the monitoring system for agricultural soils in Slovenia, to the Soil Monitoring and Resilience Directive. Multiannual and pilot projects, currently in progress or already completed, aimed at preserving healthy soils and conservation tillage practices were presented, and two round tables were held to transfer innovative and practical solutions into general practice.

On the second day of the consultation, which was attended by 380 participants in person and additionally by participants via online live streaming, a lecture was given by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Borut Vrščaj, colleague at the Faculty of Environmental Protection.

In his introductory lecture, he presented soil as an irreplaceable and non-renewable natural resource and challenged us how much we are aware of it. He highlighted the key characteristic of soil, its fertility, and the extremely long list of ecosystem services that soil provides and that we exploit on a daily basis. He particularly highlighted the service of safe food production, as we are facing ever increasing dietary needs, not only at the expense of a growing population, but also of our consumptive lifestyles and disrespectful attitudes towards food. We must be aware that the soil is a fragile natural body, with a logical sequence that is constantly being altered, adapted and degraded by man in all sectors. He also spoke about the problem of soil sealing in Slovenia, as the best fertile agricultural soils are being used for building on. Slovenia's population is growing, but at the same time the total area of agricultural land is declining, and we need to focus our efforts on protecting the extent of healthy soils.

In the second lecture, he presented the Interreg project Links4Soils, in which he presented the main project objectives, which included providing information, disseminating soil knowledge, protecting agricultural soils, reducing built-up areas, etc., and the results achieved, including the establishment of the Slovenian Soil Partnership, databases, web portals, publications, developed logos and manuals. He also presented the soil management etiquette developed within the project, which is what is (not) appropriate in soil management.

The final message of the consultation was that in today's digitisation era, answers can be found at every step. It is therefore crucial to ask quality questions and the answers will raise the quality of our lives. Unfortunately, modern society has forgotten why we need to protect the soil, we are over-degrading the soil, and that is why events like this are crucial. If we want to improve the current state of agricultural soils, we need to focus on farmers, but in a more positive way than we have done so far. Healthy soils are the basis for safe food production and farmers are our soil guardians.