



ROUND TABLE

Water for Food and Resilient Territories

Simultaneous interpretation: Italian ↔ English

Water as a source of life, prosperity, and human innovation in its governance, distribution, and use.

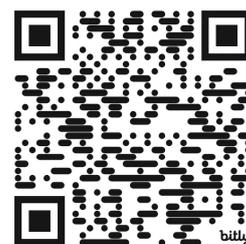
The agricultural water network connects mountain and rivers to urbanized territories within rural areas, protecting from floods while supplying water for food production and rural landscape. A network of social infrastructures creating a shared strategic interest and a common responsibility.

Date: Tuesday, 24 March 2026

Time: 13:00 - 15:00

Venue: European Parliament, Brussels
Spinelli Building, Room SPINELLI 1H1 (BRU)

Registration (link or QR code):
<https://forms.gle/QTLXp2t7AvUbj8Yh7>



Practical information for registered participants

Meeting point: 12:15 on 24 March 2026, in front of the **main entrance of the European Parliament**, for badge distribution and coordinated access.

Introduction

In a European context shaped by accelerating climate change, increasing pressure on water resources, and renewed needs for economic and territorial security, the European Parliament will host a round table dedicated to the strategic role of the water and agriculture nexus in EU investment, development, and resilience policies.

The discussion will address water as a **critical resource** closely tied to **strategic infrastructures** and a **driver of sustainable growth, moving beyond a sectoral approach** to highlight its function as an integrated territorial management system: from agricultural irrigation and food security to **soil protection**, the **prevention of hydrogeological instability** and **the protection of water resources it selves**.

Particular attention will be given to **enabling priorities** to achieve a **real water resilience** as engineering and technological solutions-efficient irrigation networks, multi-purpose reservoirs, monitoring and control systems, and water reuse-as essential tools for a planned, sustainable, and measurable approach to water governance.

This round table aims to contribute to a coherent European water policy aligned with the **CAP**, the **Green Deal**, and **Cohesion Policy**, supporting economic growth, competitiveness, and employment—while strengthening rural areas as pillars of the Union’s productive and territorial stability.

Programme (13:00–15:00) | Round Table & Open

Discussion

Institutional Greetings: On. Giovanni Barretta, *President of the Scientific and Technical Committee of the Italian Parliamentary Intergroup “Development of the South and Small Islands”*

Moderator

Alfonso Scarano - *Independent Financial Analyst; President, Rural Areas Commission, Italian Parliamentary Intergroup “Development of the South and Small Islands”*

Speakers (interventions)

- *Adaptation at whose expense?* - **Adriano Battilani** - **Secretary General, Irrigants d’Europe**
- *From abandonment to resilience: The Water–Territory nexus as a strategic lever for Europe’s rural areas* - **Armando Pugno** - **Delegate for Rural Areas, CERSTE**
- *Is it conceivable a real water resilience without water infrastructures?* **Francesco Vincenzi** – **President, Italian Association of Agricultural Water Boards ANBI**
- *Modernization of irrigation and water infrastructure mobilise water for food and environment* - **Josè Nuncio de Barahona** - **President, Portugues Association of Agricultural Water Boards Fenareg**
- *Lacking water land is abandoned, lacking infrastructures cities are flooded* - **Juan Valero de Palma Manglano** - **President, Spanish Association of Agricultural Water Boards FENACORE**
- *Can we rely on stable virtual water import? Food production and security are strategical for Europe in a changing world* - **Eric Fretillere** - **President, French Association of Agricultural Water Boards Irrigants de France**

Debate & Q&A

Key discussion themes (proposed, consistent with the concept note)

- Water security and climate adaptation: strategic priorities for EU investment
- The water–energy–food–environment nexus : governance and trade-offs
- Modernisation of irrigation and distribution networks
- Digital monitoring & control
- Multi-purpose storage, water reuse, and risk prevention (droughts/floods/hydrogeological instability)
- Metrics, data gaps, and performance indicators for measurable resilience
- Policy coherence: CAP, Green Deal, Cohesion Policy and territorial resilience

Invited participants

- Members of the European Parliament
- European Commission Directorates-General
- Universities, foundations, research centres, and institutional stakeholders
- Representatives of the Local Action Groups
- Farmer’s Associations, Environmental Associations; ONGs

Promoted by

- **Irrigants d’Europe** (<https://irrigantsdeurope.eu/>)
- **ANBI** - *National Association of Reclamation, Irrigation and Land Improvement Consortia* (<https://www.anbi.it/>)
- **Italian Parliamentary Intergroup** “*Development of the South and Small Islands*”
- **CERSTE** - *Centre Européen des Recherches Socio-Économiques, Technologiques et Environnementales* (<https://www.cerste.eu/>)

In collaboration with independent organisations and European stakeholders

Background note

Ten Steps Towards Agricultural Water Resilience

Irrigated agriculture sector welcomes the EU Commission's initiative to strengthen water security in Europe, in the light of the long-lasting efforts made by the sector to facilitate and support a constant improvement of the long-term sustainability of water use.

Nevertheless, to soothe arising intersectoral conflicts, it must be affirmed without hesitation that irrigated agriculture, using water for primary production, is an essential component of the resilient and independent future that we need to build.

The devaluation of irrigated agriculture, incessantly presented as the primary cause of resources wastage and ecosystems deterioration, do not match with the EU Commission recognition that farming is about working with nature and farmers, the foundation of a resilient Europe, are not only custodians of nature but also innovators and entrepreneurs.

There is a clear need to carry on a sustained and more effective interaction with farmers, aiming building trust and constructive dialogue implementing the Water Resilient Strategy in accordance with the EU Vision for the future of the Agriculture and Food sectors.

Whatever decision-making process that affects water governance would greatly benefit of the technical and scientific capacity of the irrigation sector, which sees Italy, Spain, Portugal and France at the world frontline in the field of agricultural water governance and irrigation, acting as a driver of innovation for the sector in Europe.

To achieve a long-lasting water resilience in everyday practice, a systemic and pragmatic approach is utmost needed.

Effective and responsive governance of the water/energy/food/environment nexus (WEFE) needs to be fostered, looking at the linkage among its components while avoiding over-simplification or excessive focus on any of them.

On the basis of these concepts, we would like to recall that irrigated agriculture is the point of connection between water and agriculture, where a synthesis of the different components of the WEF E nexus can be realized in practice producing important positive environmental and socio-economic effects.

This requires shifting from a vertical, sectoral analysis of environmental and socioeconomic impacts to a broader overall assessment of the distribution of adaptive efforts burdens among different sectors, and which portfolio of solutions is applicable.

Only in this way will it be possible to determine which innovation will need to be produced and transferred to industrial production so that it can be accessible and economically sustainable for agricultural producers, regardless of their size and capability to access credit.

To progress towards a sustainable use of water resources for agri-food and raw material production, for the protection of the rural landscape and the agro-ecosystem, the following enabling steps need to be discussed:

i) ***Water infrastructures first.*** In highly regulated and anthropized environments multifunctional agricultural infrastructures are not the last resort but a key enabler to resilience and technological innovation uptake.

ii) ***Fill data gaps.*** To be able to assess water use efficiency indicators, robust and shared datasets must be developed enabling to operate at the correct space-time scale with minimal uncertainty.

iii) ***Combine Efficiency with Nature Credits.*** Instead of merely measure water efficiency targets attainment, performance indicators could be used to assign nature credits through innovative finance instruments, helping to compensate upfront costs, data production, and difficulties in measuring outcomes that can delay short-term returns and deter investment in water/nature positive solutions.

iv) ***Take into account efficiency paradoxes.*** To operate highly efficient irrigation methods high quality water must be accessible on demand; water savings must be calculated net of technology and energy embedded water.

v) ***Assess real benefits, trade-off and drawbacks.*** Too often environmental benefits are not evaluated with enough precision to allow their monetization and

economic assessment; trade-offs, drawbacks and uneven distribution of risks among productive sectors are not assessed neither considered.

vi) Avoid premature spill over into River Basin Management Plans. Any hasty uptake of guidelines and calculation methods by River Basin Authorities may cause detrimental effects on other EU policies application, on resource reallocation, storage and farmers access to water and finally result in an uneven application of water efficiency criteria over rural areas and hydrological basins.

vii) Redefine water losses. Storage, conveyance and distribution “inefficiencies” support ecosystem services as air cooling, soil humidity and biodiversity, water table recharge, etc.

viii) Water for the environment, water for agriculture. Similarly to Eco Flow, an Agri Flow must be defined granting the minimal water amount to achieve economically viable productions.

ix) Set realistic goals and timeline. A 10% water saving would be difficult to achieve where irrigation modernisation programs are carried out since decades and as far farmers share of agricultural product added value is barely sufficient to cover production costs; a reduction of 10% of water uses in less than five years is unrealistic, unless backed by significant investments.

x) Secure equity and reciprocity. Irrigation water access for farmers is subject to stringent regulations that are not required of products imported from third countries, even though from water scarce regions; no trade agreement should be signed without first ensuring a truly level playing field for European irrigated agriculture.