

LR Dr. Stephan Pernkopf:

Opening of the **16th Expert Conference of the workgroup „Ecology and Soil Protection“ of the Arge Donauländer (Danube Countries Working Community) on March 19, 2009** in St. Pölten, Waldviertel Hall. Lower Austrian position towards the EU framework directive on soil - summary

**1. Regional cooperation within networks, such as the Danube Countries Working Community, is important**

The regions of the Danube areas represent 80 million inhabitants in Europe, and shall present their common requests.

**2. European soil protection must be area wide**

Quick and well-directed measures, which refer to developments in dynamic surroundings, can at best be implemented on the level of member states. The present drafts for a European framework directive for the protection of soil do not address the actual requirements of soil policy and would rather cause delays in implementing soil protection measures at high costs instead of improving the status of soils in Europe.

**3. Balance between quantitative und qualitative soil protection**

The intended framework directive does not provide impulses for a positive development of the producing agricultural sector, because soil impacts of utmost importance, in particular sealing will not be regulated thereby, and thus the quantitative protection of the best agricultural soils is not at all improved. Assessment and administration of risk areas for certain soil threats as required by the soil directive is the wrong approach to protect European soils in a timely and effective manner.

**4. Further development of a action-oriented soil policy**

Possible starting points are, among others, the implementation of agricultural soil protection planning as instrument of overall spatial planning processes. Moreover, existing incentive programs for improving environmental standards in agriculture such as ÖPUL and ÖKOPUNKTE should be further developed to enhance their efficiency in terms of soil protective measures. These activities should be closely linked with outreach activities of scientific institutions (e.g. BOKU) and well-informed counseling activities by the Austrian Chamber of Agriculture.

In this context, humus management is considered as the key for sustaining soil fertility and improving soil protection. Maintaining and build-up of soil humus can contribute not only to soil protection but equally to mitigation of climate change and its consequences as well as to flood prevention.

**5. I consider the 16th expert conference of the workgroup „Ecology and Soil Protection“ as an important forum for exchange of information on the status of soil protection in Europe with special emphasis on humus management and wish you all success during the coming two days in St. Pölten.**