



## P R E S S R E L E A S E

Vienna, 24 March 2026

### **Vienna Soil Dialogue: AGRANA shifts focus to soil as a strategic resource key to Europe's future**

Büttner: "Safeguarding our soil's productivity in the long term"

For the first time ever, the food and industrial group AGRANA has jointly hosted the VIENNA SOIL DIALOGUE event in collaboration with Österreichischer Raiffeisenverband, FAS Research and the IIASA (International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis). This conference focussed on a question which is rapidly gaining importance in terms of agriculture, food and supply security as well as Europe's economic stability in the light of geopolitical upheaval: What role do healthy soils play in resilient agriculture and independent production chains?

By means of the Vienna Soil Dialogue conference, AGRANA has created a new forum which regards the soil not only as the obvious basis for agriculture but as a strategic resource - for food sovereignty, economic and social stability, and Europe's geopolitical strength.

**AGRANA CEO Stephan Büttner** on the motivation behind the Vienna Soil Dialogue event: "Healthy soils are not an abstract environmental issue, forming instead the foundation for harvests, quality and security of food supplies. For AGRANA, as a processor of agricultural commodities, stability starts in the fields rather than in food processing factories. Plans to make Europe's security of supply more robust therefore need to strengthen its agricultural basis. This also requires that we acknowledge the status of the farmers who work these soils on a daily basis. Particularly in times of geopolitical upheaval, as a look at the Strait of Hormuz for example makes clear, global supply systems have become extremely vulnerable. That is why it is so important to safeguard our own commodity basis and, as a result, the productivity of our own agricultural sector. Predictable harvests, high quality commodities, fair market conditions and resilient supply chains are the prerequisites for the entire value chain – from the fields to the processing factories."

**President Austrian Raiffeisen Association Erwin Hameseder:** "Our soils are far more than just the production basis for agriculture. Especially in the new geoeconomic reality prevailing at present, they are the key precondition for the strategic strength of Austria and Europe as a whole. Any efforts to safeguard security of supply, reduce dependences and boost resilience must start with the soil. Resilience doesn't arise only when crises appear; it is established long before: with healthy soils, regional value added and an agricultural sector which is both productive and sustainable. The cooperative model of the Raiffeisen Group translates this resilience on site into tangible economic power and dependability for people and companies."

**FAS Research Director Harald Katzmair:** "Soil, water and energy are again at the heart of strategic questions. For us, soil security means the ability of a society to safeguard its food and industrial basis without undermining its biological foundations or expose itself to critical dependencies. Real security arises where we align global networks with the stability provided by fertile soils."

**Brian Fath, Principal Research Scholar at IIASA:** "IIASA Statement by Principal Research Scientist Brian Fath: If we treat soils merely as a factor of production, we overlook their true ecological function: Soils are complex, adaptive living systems. Sustainable agriculture does not arise from maximizing individual outputs, but from the balance of growth, development, and renewal. This is precisely the ecological basis of soil health and soil security."

### **Soil as a strategic resource**

In the course of this one-day conference, opinion leaders from the scientific, research and agriculture communities discussed the following issues (among others):

- The importance of soils as a strategic resource for food sovereignty and industrial commodities
- New geopolitical dependencies related to agricultural commodities, such as fertilisers
- The role of healthy soils in economic stability, climate resilience and food security

### **Prominent members at evening panel event**

The crowning event was an evening panel discussion featuring top representatives from the spheres of politics, business, the media and religion. The focus was on the question of how Europe can make its agricultural sector and food supplies more independent – by means of strengthening its own production chains, reduced dependency on imports and healthy soils as the basis for resilience and boosting its appeal as a place to live and do business. **Provincial Governor Lower Austria Johanna Mikl-Leitner** emphasized, "In Lower Austria, we demonstrate that economic growth and a firm commitment to soil conservation are not contradictory. We have consciously abandoned old conceptions of more land consumption automatically meaning more growth. But one thing is also clear: Only castles in the sky don't require land. We rely instead on using our land intelligently: Abandoned areas have priority over green fields, cooperation instead of competition and clear regulations for land use. These are the keys to creating space for companies, jobs, homes and future-oriented projects while at the same time protecting our best soils as the basis for value added, agriculture and food security. Therefore we need to create space for economic development while also protecting our most important resource – the soil." The **Austrian Minister of Agriculture Norbert Totschnig** also stressed that "Top-quality soil conservation" is a central element of food security. Our agricultural sector in Austria promotes a circular economy and is managed with a regional focus. In order to safeguard these strengths, we need to maintain and further improve soil fertility by boosting humus levels, protecting against erosion and ensuring crop cycle diversity. This is exacting what our agricultural environment programme focuses on: The participation of 80 % of our farms makes clear that this has become a role model for sustainable agriculture and makes an indispensable contribution to soil conservation."

## **New geoeconomic reality**

Through the Vienna Soil Dialogue event, AGRANA has provided a strong input to the long-term debate about the strategic importance of underlying agricultural production activities. This makes clear that soil is not only an environmental or agricultural issue but also a key factor in Europe's economic and social resilience.

Current geopolitical developments add a further explosive dimension to this discussion: The war in Iran and the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, through which around a third of all fertilisers is transported, globally threatens supplies of important soil nutrients.

### Caption:

(from left to right): FAS Director Harald Katzmair, AGRANA CEO Stephan Büttner, Raiffeisen President Austrian Raiffeisen Association Erwin Hameseder, Lower Austria Governor Johanna Mikl-Leitner, host Martina Salomon, Minister of Agriculture Norbert Totschnig, Bishop Alois Schwarz, ORF correspondent Christian Wehrschütz (image copyright: AGRANA)

### **About AGRANA**

AGRANA converts agricultural raw materials into high-quality foods and numerous industrial intermediate products. Around 9,000 employees working in its two business divisions, Food & Beverage Solutions and Agricultural Commodities & Specialities, generate annual Group revenue of approximately € 3.5 billion at 50 production facilities worldwide. The Group was founded in 1988, is the global leader in fruit preparations and a leading manufacturer (and supplier) worldwide of apple and berry juice concentrates. AGRANA is the leading sugar company in Central and Eastern Europe and a major producer of customised potato, corn and wheat starch products as well as bioethanol.

This press release is available at <https://www.agrana.com/>.