



EDA Annual Convention 2026 | Bratislava |



European Dairy: Local Roots and Global Competitiveness

Koert Verkerk is elected the new President of EDA

On 16 October, at the EDA General Assembly in Bratislava, **Koert Verkerk** was elected as the new EDA President, to lead the voice of the European milk and dairy processing industry. Verkerk succeeds **Albert de Groot**, whom he thanked for his leadership and dedication. Verkerk is Corporate Director Public Affairs at **Royal FrieslandCampina** and serves on the boards of the **Dutch Dairy Association** (NZO) and **the Global Dairy Platform** (GDP).

"I am honoured to serve as President of EDA at a time of major economic, geopolitical and sustainability challenges," Verkerk said. "Food security is once again a strategic European issue, and a competitive dairy sector has an important role to play. However, Europe cannot strengthen its food security if it weakens the economic foundations of food production."

Verkerk set out three priorities for his presidency: the confidence to invest, innovation that creates value, and open and fair markets. *"Europe's local dairy roots are the foundation of its global strength. Farmers and dairy companies thrive when they are able to invest, innovate, and compete,"* Verkerk said. [Read more here.](#)



Marián Šoltý, SMZ President, Richard Takáč, Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Slovak Republic and Koert Verkerk, EDA President

At the **EDA Annual Convention 2026** our new **EDA President Koert Verkerk** welcomed more than 200 dairy representatives from across the world to Bratislava, in the heart of Europe.

"Although Slovakia represents a small share of EU milk production, dairy farming and processing are among the most important sectors of our agri-food industry. We are proud to be part of the European dairy family and delighted to welcome you to Bratislava!" said **Marián Šoltý**, President of **the Slovak Dairy Association** (Slovenský mliekarenský zväz – SMZ), the host of this year's Convention. Held under the auspices of **Richard Takáč, Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Slovak Republic**, the Convention highlighted the importance of Slovakia's dairy sector: *"Milk is an everyday part of our lives, yet behind every product lies a great deal of hard work—from the farm all the way to the dairy. Our task is to ensure that this effort is rewarding and that we are able to produce and process more of our own milk here in Slovakia. I believe that gatherings like this one help us find common solutions and drive the entire sector forward."*

The Convention's overall theme **"European Dairy: Local Roots and Global Competitiveness"** was explored through wide-ranging discussions from different angles including trade, competitiveness, sustainability, nutrition, with one guiding line: **how can EU dairy strengthen its local roots to lead globally?**



Koert Verkerk, EDA President, FrieslandCampina (NL)

European Dairy: Local Roots and Global Competitiveness

How can the European dairy industry build on its rich regional heritage to strengthen its global competitiveness?

In the first session of our Annual Convention, leading figures from across the dairy industry explored this question, discussing how strong local roots, regional expertise and close ties to local communities can provide the foundations for success on the global stage. **Flavio Coturni**, Head of Unit for **DG TRADE**, set



EDA President Koert Verkerk and Flavio Coturni, EU Commission

the scene and outlined the position of the **European Commission**: "Dairy is strength for Europe, your industry is based on strength in trade, in quality, in innovation and in trust."

Christoph Till, Managing Director (SK/CR/HU) at **MEGGLE**: "It's important for us to maintain our local character and work through our local network, so we can scale up to seize new opportunities, while continuing to improve our packaging and labelling."

Piercristiano Brazzale, CEO of **Brazzale Spa** emphasised: "The industry must invest in greater transparency and sustainability. I also want to underline the importance of genetics." **Oisin Morrin**, CEO of **Tippagral** France: "Food is never just another industry. It is strategic. It is economic. But it is also profoundly human. When a dairy succeeds, it does much more than produce cheese, butter or milk powder. It creates employment. It sustains local businesses. And it gives young people reasons to build their futures in rural Europe."

We'd like to thank **Rose O'Donovan** of **AGRA FACTS** for expertly moderating the panel.



Rose O'Donovan, Christoph Till, Piercristiano Brazzale, Oisin Morrin and Flavio Coturni

The session also included presentations by **Alex Henriksen** of **Tetra Pak**, one of the world's leading packaging companies on their nutritional and sustainability strategy and **Karl Nilsson** and **Ludovic Meilhac** from **McKinsey & Company**, who presented an overview of prevailing sentiment among CEOs across the dairy sector.



Alex Henriksen
Managing Director East Europe, Tetra Pak



Ludovic Meilhac & Karl Nilsson
McKinsey & Company



EDA says yes to Ukraine!



Alexander Anton with the Ukrainian Delegation: Elisabeth Svyatkovska, Andriy Tabalov and Arsen Didur

We had the honour to have **Andriy Tabalov**, CEO of **Voloshkove Pole Dairy Company** and Member of the Board of Directors of the Union of Dairy Enterprises of Ukraine, presenting the Ukrainian dairy sector, a sector that is resilient today, European by nature. "A sector that keeps investing, protects its people and strengthens Europe's dairy future. Thank you for saying yes to Ukraine, to Ukrainian dairy and Ukrainian integration", said Andriy Tabalov.

Dairy Delivering Nutrition: Excellence Across the World

Session two: **"Dairy Delivering Nutrition Excellence Across the World"** explored the important role of dairy in global nutrition. **Pietro Paganini**, President of **Competere**, set the scene and highlighting the value of data on dairy and the need to improve how it informs future decisions: *"Data tells us where it is, leadership defines where it goes."* **Daniela Martini**, **University of Milan**, discussed dairy's nutritional and health contributions amid debates on ultra-processed foods, highlighting its consistent nutritional relevance worldwide. **Miquela Hanselman**, **National Milk Producers Federation**, outlined U.S. nutrition policy priorities, including healthier school meals, defining ultra-processed foods and front-of-pack labelling. Finally, **Martin Polovka**, National Agriculture and **Food Centre Slovakia**, highlighted nutritional adequacy and healthy ageing as key priorities, with dairy providing a unique combination of nutrients to support these goals.

The session opened with presentations from **Isabelle Pitter**, representing the Women in Dairy network, on the importance of women in the dairy industry, **Adela Putinelu** of **CRYOVAC®** spoke on how their dairy packaging can deliver both protection and responsibility and **Gilles Froment**, President of the **International Dairy Federation** (IDF), whose attendance further underlined the international significance of the Convention, spoke on EU dairy's importance for global nutrition: *"Let us continue to be part of the international conversation. Let us bring Europe's long-standing experience with confidence, listen with openness to others, and work together to support a more balanced, credible and constructive understanding of dairy's contribution to healthy and sustainable diets."*



EDA President Koert Verkerk, Pietro Paganini, Daniela Martini and EDA secretary general Alexander Anton



Miquela Hanselman
Senior Director of Regulatory
Affairs
National Milk Producers
Federation



Martin Polovka
Food Specialist
National Agricultural and Food
Center



Gilles Froment
IDF President



Adela Putinelu
Senior Manager, Government Affairs
EMEA, CRYOVAC®



Isabelle Pitter
Chief Procurement & Supply Chain
Officer
Prolactal GmbH,
Women in Dairy

Ďakujem veľmi pekne!

Our gala dinner at the Bratislava Castle was the ideal moment for our EDA President **Koert Verkerk** to express the gratitude of the European lactosphere to **Zuzana Nouzovská** and her SMZ team, **Jana Plankova**, **Gabriela Ruzsik** for their perfect organisation of our conference!



Gabriela Ruzsik, Jana Plankova, Zuzana Nouzovská

Save the dates!



Welkom Koert!

"Koert brings the strategic insight and international experience EDA needs. His leadership will strengthen our work to ensure that Europe's ambitions are matched by a competitive dairy sector able to invest, innovate and succeed globally. I look forward to working with you."

-EDA secretary general Alexander Anton



EDA President Koert Verkerk and
EDA secretary general Alexander Anton

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