

Estonian farmers are more interested in the Common Agricultural Policy of Europe, the seven-year budget of the European Union and our own agricultural development plan than the local elections, President Ilves noted when presenting the Farmer of the Year 2013 award. The competition held by the weekly Maaleht was won by cattle and cereal farmer Tõnu Post.

According to President Ilves, the news from Europe is good rather than bad for Estonian farmers and when considering this year's favourable weather conditions, it is no wonder that a completely new character has made an appearance in our television news: the content farmer.

"This is the result of your hard work, economically difficult and often risky decisions and an increasing need to study, both at home as well as abroad. Those who have succeeded at it can be quite content today," the Head of State said.

"There is a lot of discussion, often concerned, about the future of Estonian rural areas. Some think that only Tallinn can offer jobs for everyone and that some things are even free of charge there and, in contrast, rural areas are places of emptiness and poverty," President Ilves said. "I am not denying that there are many regions in Estonia that lack residents and services, where the local government lacks the means and possibilities to improve people's lives. However, I disagree with those who claim that this is the case everywhere and it is irreversible."

The beginnings of the Estonian state go back to successful farmers who sent their sons to school in towns, the Head of State reminded and added: "Likewise, today's successful farmers and the living environments they have created could become centres that will rejuvenate many rural areas."

The President noted that urbanisation is a global process, stressing: "However, I do not see it as a problem alone; it is not like the winners are in the city and the losers are in the countryside. If there are jobs available in the country, there are also people."

According to the Head of State, there is a great deal of unused resources in rural areas, both in terms of work efficiency as well as living environment; agricultural production is increasingly the work of brains and machines, rather than real pairs of hands.

"However, in a situation where the market is increasingly fragmented and segmented, we do need people to place a high value on rural production and related areas and meet increasingly specific demands. Much more people than we currently have in the countryside, close to the production," President Ilves said.

"Therefore - do not believe that there is life only in Tallinn or even further, across the border. This life is very much existent right here in Estonia. And it is largely thanks to you," the Head of State said in recognition of farmers.

The Farmer of the Year 2013 Tõnu Post employs 27 people in the Pihtla municipality in Saaremaa county. His company, Kõljala Põllumajanduslik OÜ, is active in dairy farming - it has 521 dairy cows with an annual yield of 10,834 kilogrammes per cow, and young cattle; 1,500 hectares of land is cultivated, nearly 500 hectares of which is used for cereal farming; the yield of rye is 3.5 tonnes per hectare, the yield of winter wheat is 4.8 tonnes per hectare and the yield of barley is 3.8 tonnes per hectare.

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