

OPERA



Comments to the new proposal for a new EU Common Agricultural Policy

Who?

Five farming and environmental NGOs¹ have come together with proposals to transform the CAP with the objective to help farmers improve on the sustainability of their activities and to reward those who deliver the environmental benefits. They believe that the CAP is failing citizens, farmers and the environment, and requires radical change to justify the 53 billion Euros it distributes annually on behalf of European taxpayers. They do recognise that changes to agriculture over the last 50 years have benefited society by providing plentiful and safer food. However, they argue that this achievement is based on the unsustainable use of natural resources and has damaged the environment. Furthermore, they highlight their ongoing concern about pesticide residues in food and the potential health implications of exposure to agricultural chemicals.

What do they propose for the new CAP?

- A radical transition towards truly sustainable farming practices that can provide long term optimal yields, while using natural resources efficiently.
- In future, payments will be based on a contract between society and farmers, with support available for those who produce environmental benefits.
- Payments would shift from subsidy entitlements towards agreements underpinning payments for public goods in a transparent and accountable way.
- Some of the most important public goods associated with agriculture include farmland biodiversity, conservation of agricultural genetic resources, watershed functionality, attractive agricultural landscapes, Carbon storage, resilience to wildfire and other natural hazards, ecosystem resilience in the face of climate change and rural vitality.
- Certain farming systems are identified as delivering a wide range of public goods in larger quantities than others. Such systems include High Nature Value farming systems (typically low intensity farming systems) and Organic Farming. As such a number of specific support mechanisms have been proposed including:
 - Basic Farm Sustainability Scheme
 - HNV System Support Scheme
 - Organic System Support Scheme
 - Targeted Agri-Environment Scheme
 - Natura 2000 and WFD Compensation Scheme
- Changes in consumption patterns which is seen as both necessary and complementary to achieving more sustainable models of agriculture. A number of EU environmental Directives should be explicitly added to the mandatory baseline and key rules must be added to current

¹ BirdLife International, European Environmental Bureau, European Forum on Nature Conservation and Pastoralism, International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements-EU Group, WWF – World Wide Fund for Nature

legislation, regarding: protection against conversion of permanent grassland; deliberate damage of landscape elements; unsprayed and unfertilised buffer strips; stubble burning; etc.

The CAP must contribute to EU priorities such as sustainable development and environmental protection. The original CAP objectives must be fundamentally revised

What do we say?

- The content of the new policy has to respond to the society challenges of the day, but also to the interests of those directly affected by it.
- Provision of public goods has to be seen much more widely and to include socio-economic factors; development issues; technological advances; conservation of cultural heritage; maintenance of public health and, crucially, the achievement of EU and worldwide food security objectives, in which Europe must play its part.. Any EU policy, and particularly the CAP, has to deliver towards the objectives set out in the EU Treaties.
- The CAP has to promote research and development in the agricultural area as to ensure technological progress and new innovative solutions for our production systems;
- The competitiveness of the EU production on the world market it has to be central, as to be able to respect the international commitments under WTO for an open and fair trade;
- The policy has to contribute to reducing regional disparities and structural difficulties among all the farming communities in the EU.
- EU's new vision has to maintain a "common policy" for all Member States.
- Sustainability of using natural resources and economic viability and competitiveness for the EU products on the world market are key elements.The proposed management system based on individual contracts will not satisfy the principles of simplification – indeed it could add to the bureaucratic burden and would likely prove to be unworkable.
- The proposed new CAP has failed to identify food security as being central to its objectives or take into account the fact that productive & competitive farming systems can and do deliver environmental benefits and public goods, as well as meeting the output demands imposed on agriculture by society.
- We do not agree with that developments in the past 50 years have been based on unsustainable use of resources. Recent years resulted in new technologies which enhanced the sustainable use of resources substantially and decreased the concerns regarding the safety of plant protection products in relation to human health and the environment if applied correctly.
- Scraping entirely a policy which has developed over the years is not our first choice.
- We must also ensure that the policies we propose do not result in a shift in the supply of food from extra-EU sources where we cannot control the production.
- The new CAP has to contribute to the improvement of standards of living in rural areas and providing for a level of income of the rural population similar to that achieved in the urban area;
- The compulsory requirements should not include the provisions of framework directives on water, soil and sustainable pesticide use since their implementation is dealt with in the corresponding national action plans.