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AGRICULTURE : How Europe uses its land

Judging from the number of cattle roaming around the European range, the old continent almost seems like the land of the cowboys and gauchos. There are in fact more than 25 million milk cows chewing on the green grass of the European Community, and they represent only about a third of the total cattle herds of the nine Community countries prior to Greece's entry this year, which was estimated at about 77.9 million head in 1979.

This data is contained in a new annual publication of the European Community Statistical Office, entitled "EUROSTAT Review". This publication in one single volume gathers all the statistics that illustrate the development of the European Community over the last ten years, from economic and demographic data to information on social, financial and other matters.

What do cattle have to do with all this ? They also figure in a chapter entitled "Agriculture, forests and fishing". In it there is information also of interest about land use in the Community. The land mass of the Community totals 152.6 million hectares (380 million acres). In 1979, forests covered 21 per cent of this area, or slightly more than in 1970 when the figure was 20 per cent. Environmentalists should therefore feel reassured that Europe is not abandoning its natural heritage. To the contrary even, since the amount of timber extracted from these forests fell from 82.6 million tonnes in 1970 to 74.5 million tons in 1977.

The agricultural land area in use also declined, from 64 per cent of the total in 1970 to 61 per cent in 1979. This reduction has obviously been compensated by an increase in agricultural productivity and therefore the average yield per unit. The proof is that in the last ten years the Community has become self-sufficient in grain, sugar and beef.

Other statistics indicate that in 1975, the nine Community members counted more than 5 million farm holdings of more than one hectare in size, of which 323,000 contained more than 50 hectares. The about 6.2 million farmers working this land used a total of 4.7 million tractors and 484,000 harvesters or reapers.

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ENVIRONMENT : Fighting lead pollution

The fight to keep Europe's air clean appears to be a never-ending one. Prompted by recent studies underlining the dangers of lead exposure for human beings, especially children, the European Commission has taken steps to cut-down the total amount of atmospheric lead to which the population is exposed.

Exposure to lead is attributable to several sources including lead emitted into the atmosphere from the tailpipe of automobiles and from industrial sources. The food we eat and the water we drink also contains lead.

Action by the European Commission has focussed on limiting the lead content in petrol, thereby curtailing lead emissions into the atmosphere by cars. Commission experts underline, however, that it is the total lead "burden" rather than just the lead emission into the air which can eventually be detrimental to human health, especially for children.

A Community directive issued in June 1978 limits the maximum lead content to 0.4 g of lead per litre of petrol as of January 1, 1981 in all Member States. No new efforts are expected in this field until the Commission can determine the results on air quality of the 1978 directive.

Experience within the Federal Republic of Germany has shown that a considerable period of time is required if such an adjustment of the permitted lead content of petrol is to be carried out smoothly. Similar experience has been made in Sweden and Switzerland.

This delay is needed to allow the refining industry to adjust its production facilities to the required lower level, while maintaining the petrol quality in terms of octane rating at about the same level as before.

In the framework of its programme on the rational use of energy, the Commission, in collaboration with the refining and the car industry, has examined just how the control on the lead content of petrol would influence the Community's energy saving goals. Studies on this question are continuing.

EDUCATION : A European public relations programme

Public relations for several years has constituted an essential part of the management of businesses and other organisations. The activities of this profession in full expansion have been coordinated at the European level by the European Public Relations Confederation. The EPRC, which gathers the national professional associations of 14 European countries worked for three years to define a "European programme for teaching in public relations", acceptable in all the countries of the Community. This programme will be put in practice for the first time during the course of the 1981/82 university year by the new "Institut supérieur d'enseignement des relations publiques" (ISERP), located at 115 rue Notre-Dame des Champs, Paris (75006).

ENERGY : The slow reconversion to coal power

While in 1960 coal represented about 60 per cent of the power used by the "other industries" which are not the major users of coal energy, this share had dropped to about 9 per cent by 1978.

This decline in coal power in the sectors other than the traditional coal consumers, such as power plants and the steel industry, represents both a troubling trend and a source of potential progress in a period marked by a search for alternative energy sources. Other industries which either once used coal or could switch to it in the future, such as the cement, glass, chemical, paper, food, heating and other sectors, are now consuming fuel or natural gas, which are in increasingly short supply. And experts hope that a conversion to coal might relieve the general pressure on oil and gas which has threatened energy and economic conditions in the industrialised world since the first oil crisis of 1973-74.

But the reason why these industries are using other energy sources and not coal are important and remain major obstacles to a conversion which must be coped with if a transfer is to be achieved.

First there is the cost factor which still makes the use of coal itself or the conversion process to furnaces and processes using coal uneconomic for some sectors. There are also a number of transportation or supply bottlenecks which would make potential users think twice about depending on coal in the future. There exist a number of psychological or real legislative impediments such as the substantial ecological and environmental concerns about the impact of coal use. A large body of legislation has been adopted in recent years which limit the development of coal use because of the potential pollution effect.

All these factors were recently studied in a publication released by the European Commission on the subject entitled "The Substitution of Coal for Oil in the 'Other Industries'".

It notes that outside the electricity generating sector, there is inadequate information about how the search for other energy sources could be advanced. It indicates that because of its diversity and different power needs, it is unlikely that coal could ever again assume the role it once had in this sector. But the report feels that there is potential for shifts back to coal use which must be developed and makes recommendations to help this process. Among the proposals are improvement of the information on coal and pricing, the promotion of new technologies and pilot projects through financial aids in the research field, development of transports to assure a steady supply and making sure that environmental needs are positively met and incorporated in any coal promotion campaign.

ECONOMY : Consolidating the EMS

We live in a world of monetary instability and wide-ranging currency fluctuations.

The world monetary and economic order that prevailed in the first two post-war decades disappeared in the seventies. The break of the double, fixed link, between gold and the dollar, and between the dollar and other currencies, the emergence of a multicurrency reserve system, the floating of exchange rates, the shift of the power to fix energy prices from oil companies to the oil-producing countries themselves, are all indications that the order as we knew it has come to an end.

It has not, however, been replaced by a new one. In an increasingly interdependent world this can mean economic and political chaos.

The setting up of the European Monetary System in 1978 was Europe's attempt to bring back a semblance of stability at least in its own region. More work on consolidating the system is, however, required in the coming years.

According to European Commission President, Gaston Thorn, who spoke at a recent seminar on the role and future of the European Monetary System held in Bruges, European efforts should focus on three main areas :

- Member States should undertake a coherent policy to combat inflation by the implementation of concerted actions as regards demand and supply, incomes, and interest rates;
- a global approach designed to search out solutions for the financing of balance of payment deficits currently facing all EEC countries;
- a common approach to international monetary relations, particularly as regards efforts to stabilise exchange rates between European currencies and with the United States dollar.

Thorn recognised the dominant role of the dollar on the world monetary scene and the impact it has on the European Monetary System. As such Europeans cannot adopt an attitude of "benign neglect" vis-à-vis the dollar, but rather should try to adopt a coherent monetary policy towards the American currency. The ECU for instance, should be allowed to play a major role in Europe, thus prompting a certain degree of stability.

Finally, Thorn urged progress towards the second phase of the European Monetary System, and the setting up of a European Monetary Fund, designed to consolidate the EMS. Monetary stability was particularly essential in a world characterised by economic and political crisis, he concluded.

PROBLEMS OF EUROPE'S MOUNTAIN REGIONS

In addition to the urban centres and the coastal regions, Europe's mountain areas also pose certain specific problems. 15% of Europe's population lives in the mountainous zones, be it in the Alpes, the Jura, the Ardennes, Upper Scotland, the Vosges or the Apennins. Almost half of the population in these regions works in the services sector; the industrial sector is under-represented, and agriculture work only takes up a fraction of the active population.

The Community's mountainous regions face serious development problems, essentially because of the difficulties in trying to conciliate three categories of different interests.

As far as the local population is concerned, these regions should be able to satisfy the fundamental needs concerning employment, lodging, education and culture as well as transport facilities.

For tourists, facilities as regards holiday stay-overs, leisure activities, and easy access to urban centres, should be available.

But, the mountain zones should also continue to be important from the point of view of health. This means unpolluted air, pure drinking water, beautiful flowers and plants, etc.

These different needs can lead to certain conflicts. Problems can arise, for instance, when there is no space left for the construction of houses for local populations because all land has been sold to visitors.

Economic development can also provoke problems for the natural ecological balance of these regions. These difficulties are particularly acute in the communes. But as the Community's mountain zones are, generally speaking, on the frontiers between states, all specialised studies call for the need for an integrated policy on a European level.

The mountain regions include several under-developed zones, and some "over-developed" regions, often situated very close to one another.

The major under-developed regions are situated in the French and Italian alps. Here employment is a major problem, particularly once the tourist season is over. Migration towards towns is another problem, both in the mountains and the valleys. Urbanisation is restricted to the areas bordering the mountains or to zones which have already been developed from the tourist point of view. These zones suffer from serious environmental problems, linked to deforestation, the building of hotels, expansion of houses, etc. Such activities aggravate the risks of erosion, torrents and avalanches.

These trends are exacerbated by the rapid decline in agricultural activities in the mountain regions. As productivity is low, a number of farmers are tempted to abandon their farms and to take up other jobs. One way of slowing down their trend is to develop the concept of "farm holidays". But this can, on the other hand, create an enormous amount of work for the farmers' family.

The rapid increase in secondary residences in the mountains has also provoked problems leading to land speculation, the creation of ghost towns, etc. The local economy only benefits from such activities during a very short tourist season. On the other hand, maintaining such infrastructure can become quite costly for the resident population.

These specific problems facing the mountain regions have been studied in detail in a study written for the European Commission by a group of independent experts. The report suggests a number of wide-ranging options for Community action in the area. It suggests, for instance, that Member States should introduce special procedures designed to evaluate the impact of new investment projects and plans on the environment. The European Commission should also, suggests the study, draw up an ecological map of the Community territory on the basis of uniform criteria.

Another priority action would be to develop agriculture and forestry. Experts feel that special emphasis should be put on improving the quality of products. High-quality produce in these regions would become an alternative to mass farm production in the plains.

Turning to the Ten's tourist policy, the study recommends that an attempt should be made to decentralise existing holiday centres, protect existing sites and nature, and create jobs for local populations by focussing on trade and handicrafts.

A total of 53 proposals for actions are made by the study. Some of these will certainly be taken up by the next EEC programme on the environment.