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NEWSLETTER ON THE COMMON AGRICULTURAL POLICY

The new Agricultural Structures Policy



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Introduction

1. The Treaty of Rome assigns the common agricultural policy the task, inter alia, of increasing agricultural productivity by promoting technical progress, by ensuring the rational development of agricultural production and the optimum utilisation of factors of production, thus providing a fair standard of living for the agricultural community, in particular by increasing the individual earnings of persons engaged in agriculture.
2. A policy which concentrated solely on measures aimed at supporting markets and prices would not be sufficient to attain these Treaty objectives. On a great number of holdings, particularly in certain regions of the Community, farming is handicapped due to deficiencies of a physical or socio-economic nature. Many farms suffer from problems of small size, poor land quality or adverse climatic conditions. Frequently, the advanced age of the farmer or inadequate education or training are further impediments to the rational development of holdings. For a considerable number of farmers structural deficiencies of this sort are major obstacles to the achievement of a reasonable standard of living.
3. Structural measures, aimed at improving the efficiency of farming and living, working and production conditions in agriculture particularly on those smaller holdings most seriously affected by natural or socio-economic deficiencies, are therefore a prerequisite to the attainment of the objectives of the CAP.
4. In the 1960's during the first phase of the application of the CAP the structural element was in general confined to co-ordinating national structural policies and aiding certain projects at Community level.
5. The first major step towards a more comprehensive structures policy was taken in 1972 when the Council adopted a number of socio-structural Directives (1). The essential aim of these measures was to encourage farmers by means of investment aids to establish modern farming units

(1) Directive 72/159/EEC on the modernisation of farms.

Directive 72/160/EEC concerning measures to encourage the cessation of farming and the reallocation of utilised agricultural area for the purposes of structural improvement.

Directive 72/161/EEC on the provision of socio-economic guidance for and the acquisition of occupational skills by persons engaged in agriculture.

capable of providing living standards comparable to the non-farming population in the region. For those farmers not in a position to achieve this objective less attractive aids were provided or the option of early retirement.

6. The second stage in the development of the policy began in 1975 with the adoption by the Council of Directive 75/268/EEC (1). The purpose of this measure was to strengthen the instruments of the farm modernising Directive in regions where agriculture was permanently affected by natural handicaps and thus to ensure the continuation of farming, to help maintain the population and to conserve the countryside in those regions.
7. This regional bias was further emphasised in subsequent years with the adoption of a series of specific measures aimed at alleviating serious structural or infrastructural problems in a number of regions.
8. Finally in 1977 to complement the existing measures in favour of production structures, the Council adopted Regulation (EEC) No 355/77 (2) which aims at improving the processing and marketing structures in the agricultural sector. Under this measure the Community aids processing and marketing projects which are put forward under national sectoral programmes approved by the Commission.

The need for Reform

9. With the expiration of the period of validity of the principal socio-structural Directives at the end of 1983 it was opportune to take stock of the policy in the light of experience and to consider the shape of the policy to be applied in the years ahead.
10. The basic approach of the 1972 policy measures had been conceived against a background of the buoyant economic conditions of the 1960's and early 1970's. Then the climate for investment in agriculture was good and for those who opted to leave farming ample employment opportunities existed elsewhere. By the 1980's, however, the economic environment had changed radically, being characterised by low or nil growth rates and massive unemployment. The development of agricultural incomes had slowed while regional disparities had widened. The squeeze on farm incomes in the latter half of the 1970's coupled with increasing production costs made it difficult for farmers to achieve the "modernising" target. The diminishing impact of Directive 72/159/EEC can be gauged from the numbers of farmers undertaking modernisation by means of farm development plans which peaked at 30,000 in 1978 but then fell away steadily so that by 1982 only 15,000 plans were approved.

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- (1) on mountain and hill farming and farming in certain less-favoured areas.
 - (2) on common measures to improve the conditions under which agricultural products are processed and marketed.

11. A second major consideration which gave cause for reflection was the trend towards increasing surpluses of many agricultural products during the 1970's and early 1980's. Already restrictive measures were being taken under the markets and prices policy with a view to counteracting this trend and easing the strain on the Community budget brought about by costly disposal measures. It was therefore important to consider in what way the structures policy might be better geared to fit in with market policy objectives. Whereas in the past structural development had been more or less synonymous with intensification of production, the future structures policy would have to concentrate on measures which would not stimulate production increases.
12. Furthermore the farmer retirement measures under Directive 72/160/EEC had had only a very limited impact on the structure of agricultural holdings. Up to 1982, 1.2 million hectares or a little over 1 % of the total utilised agricultural area of the Community had been released by retiring farmers. But the potential structural benefit of freeing this land was not realised. In effect for every one retiring farmer the released land was, on average, divided between two other farmers. Furthermore only 15 % of the land went to farmers modernising under Directive 72/159/EEC.
13. In the light of these developments major changes in the aid systems at farm level were clearly called for. In addition adjustments to certain of the other existing policy instruments were found to be necessary in order to provide a coherent set of measures to tackle the continuing structural problems facing Community agriculture.
14. The new agricultural structures policy

New policy proposals were put forward by the Commission to the Council in October 1983. These involved
 - the replacement of the policy Directives of 1972 by a new Regulation for improving the efficiency of agricultural structures and
 - the revision of Regulation (EEC) 355/77 on processing and marketing structures in the agricultural sector.
15. The revised version of Regulation (EEC) 355/77 was adopted by the Council on 19 June 1984 but it was a further nine months before the Council finally adopted the "efficiency" Regulation, on 13 March 1985.

16. The main priorities of these measures can be summarised as follows

- the improvement or safeguarding of farm incomes particularly of those in the lower income bracket and the improvement of living, working and production conditions
- the maintenance of employment in agriculture
- the encouragement of productivity improvements which will not stimulate production of additional surpluses
- the intensification of efforts at regional level.

17. Main features of new policy

As regards on-farm investment aids the new policy extends aid to a much wider range of farmers than heretofore, particularly those in the lower income bracket. The conditions for qualifying for aid have been simplified and, in particular, farmers are no longer required to show that they can achieve a fixed income target. The aim is to help them improve their income, or to safeguard it where it is at risk, and to improve living, working and production conditions. The emphasis will be on aiding investments aimed at reducing production costs, at improving product quality and at reconverting production in line with market requirements. The general principle has been established that aid may be restricted or prohibited where this will lead to increased production of surplus products. The application of this rule will be decided later but in the meantime specific restrictions will apply in certain sectors.

18. Other measures aimed at improving conditions on farms take the form of launching aid for the establishment of mutual aid groups, farm replacement and farm management services and for the keeping of farm accounts.

19. The development of a modern efficient farm sector will in the future depend to a great extent on the early transfer of holdings to young, progressive men and women. Special aids are therefore being made available to help adequately qualified young people to establish themselves in farming and to carry out farm improvements.

20. In the less-favoured areas the provisions of Directive 75/268/EEC have been strengthened by means of improvements in the system of compensatory allowances, by increases in aid for tourist and craft activities and by more generous benefits for joint investment schemes by two or more farmers. A number of the existing specific regional measures have been adapted to take account of the changes in the "horizontal" policy. Finally a new framework has been established for future action in specific regions suffering from serious structural or infrastructural handicaps.

21. Forestry activity on agricultural holdings is being encouraged by provision of investment aids both for new developments and for improvement of existing woodland. Apart from helping to improve farm structures in the longer term, particularly in less-favoured regions, this measure will provide a useful alternative to production of surplus agricultural products.
22. The foregoing new structural measures will not have the desired impact if farmers are inadequately trained to avail of them. Thus the new Regulation also contains improved provisions on the training of persons engaged in agriculture, including aid for the construction of training centres in less-favoured areas.
23. In recent years increasing attention has been paid to the need to conserve the environment for ecological and social reasons. These considerations are taken into account in a number of ways in the new policy. In particular, Member States are authorised to pay aids to farmers in environmentally sensitive zones to encourage them to follow farming practices compatible with the environment.
24. Finally, Regulation (EEC) 355/77 has been amended with a view to encouraging the use of new technology, the production of new products and the development of new market outlets. The ultimate objective of this measure is to improve the added value of agricultural production and enable the farmer to share in the benefits which accrue.

The new policy in detail

25. Aids towards on-farm investments

(i) The farm improvement plan

To qualify for aid a farmer must

- practise farming as his main occupation
- have adequate professional competence
- submit an improvement plan showing that his investments are worth while and will bring about a lasting and substantial improvement in the economic situation of his farm, in particular, in unit labour income. However, a plan may also be accepted where the farmer shows that it is necessary in order to safeguard the existing level of income per labour unit.

- undertake to keep simplified accounts. However, in the disadvantaged areas of Greece and the Mezzogiorno this condition will not be applied during the first three years of operation of the new policy, provided the investment does not exceed 25,000 ECU and the holding does not require more than one labour unit.

Only those farmers whose income is below a reference income may qualify for aid. The reference income will be fixed by the Member States but it cannot be greater than the average income of non-agriculture workers in the region. Furthermore the improvement plan may not provide for the achievement of a labour income of more than 120 % of the reference income.

Farmers may present plans on their own behalf or on behalf of a group-operated holding. Only two plans per farmer may be presented within a six-year period.

(ii) Volume and rates of aid

Aid is payable on a maximum volume of investment of 60,000 ECU per labour unit and 120,000 ECU per holding; this is increased to 360,000 ECU for a group-operated holding. The maximum rates of aid, expressed in terms of capital grant are, in normal areas, 35 % for investments in fixed assets and 20 % for other investments; in the disadvantaged areas the equivalent rates are 45 % and 30 % respectively. These aids may also be given in the form of interest rate subsidies.

In the case of Greece, Italy and Ireland a further additional ten percentage points may be added to these rates of aid during the first 2 1/2 years of operation of the new policy. This supplementary aid takes account of the higher financing costs in the Member States in question.

(iii) Types of investment

The system of aid covers investments aimed at

- qualitative improvement and reconversion of production in line with market requirements
- reducing production costs
- improving living and working conditions
- saving energy
- protection and improvement of the environment.

(iv) Prohibitions and restrictions

As a general principle, aids for investments aimed at increasing production of products in structural surplus may be restricted or totally prohibited. The Council, acting on a Commission proposal, will decide on the measures to be taken and the products in question.

In the meantime specific restrictions will apply in a number of sectors, as follows :

- Milk

No aid may be granted where this would lead to a farmer's milk quota being exceeded. However, if he obtains an additional milk quota, as provided for under the quota arrangements (e.g. by buying or leasing land to which a quota attaches) he may, within the limits of his increased quota, receive aid to increase production but subject to the following specific limits :

- . the investment cannot bring the number of dairy cows to more than 40 per labour unit or 60 per farm (1)
- . if the farm has more than 1.5 labour units, the investment cannot allow an increase of more than 15 % in the dairy herd.

- Pigs

Aid for increasing pig production is limited as follows :

- . for requests received before 31 December 1986, to investments bringing the number of pig fattening places to 500 (2) per holding
- . for requests received between 1 January and 31 December 1987, to investments bringing the number of pig fattening places to 400 per holding
- . for requests received between 1 January 1988 and 31 December 1989, the regime of aid will be decided by the Council before 31 December 87. In the absence of such a decision the Commission will fix the limit on the number of pig places which may be aided within the range 300-500 places and subject to an overall ceiling per holding to be fixed within the range 600-800 places.

(1) in the case of group-operated holdings a limit of 120 cows will apply.

(2) in the case of group-operated holdings a limit of 3 times the limits fixed for individual holdings will apply.

Furthermore on completion of an investment plan for pig production the holding must be capable of producing 35 % of the feed consumed by the pigs.

- Poultry

Investment aids are totally prohibited.

Apart from these specific sectoral restrictions, aid will not be allowed in respect of land purchase, nor for purchase of pigs, poultry or calves for slaughter. For other livestock aid may only be paid for the initial purchase of stock.

26. Measures for young farmers

The Regulation provides for two special aids for young farmers, that is, those under 40 years of age, viz

(i) Installation aid

To benefit from this aid the young farmer must

- . instal himself as a farmer practising farming as his main occupation;
- . already have, or obtain within two years of his installation, an adequate professional qualification;
- . take over a farm requiring the work of at least one labour unit.

The installation aids comprise

- . a flat-rate premium of a maximum eligible amount of 7,500 ECU;
- . an interest rate subsidy on loans taken out to cover installation costs, of a maximum of 5 % over 15 years and equivalent in capital terms to a maximum of 7,500 ECU.

(ii) Extra investment aid

The young farmer may receive additional aid of up to 25 % of the aid normally payable under the system of farm improvement plans, provided he prepares a plan within five years of his installation and complies with the condition as to professional competence.

27. Other measures for farms and farmers

(i) Aid for keeping farm accounts

The aid will be fixed by the Member States within the range 700-1,050 ECU to be spread over at least four years. In order to qualify, the farmer must be a "principal occupation" farmer and he must keep the accounts for at least four years. This aid is available whether or not the farmer prepares a farm improvement plan but the type of accounts to be kept will be more detailed than the "simplified" accounts prescribed under the system of improvement plans.

(ii) Launching aid for mutual aid groups

This aid is designed to encourage the establishment of recognised groups of farmers with a view to common use of equipment, joint farming operations, etc. The maximum launching aid is 15,000 ECU per group and is intended to contribute to the operating costs of the group during a maximum of five years following its establishment.

(iii) Launching aid for replacement services

This aid is provided to encourage the establishment by agricultural associations of farm relief services. The aid is designed to help cover the management costs of the service. The level of aid is fixed at 12,000 ECU per full-time agent employed and is to be divided over the first five years of the agent's employment.

(iv) Launching aid for farm management services

The purpose of this aid is to encourage the establishment, by agricultural associations, of farm management services which by analysing farmer's accounts and other economic data, will help farmers to manage their farms more economically. The aid is 12,000 ECU per full-time agent employed, to be divided over the first five years of the agent's employment.

Member States are, however, given the option of replacing this launching aid with a system of aids payable to farmers who use farm management services. In this case a farmer may receive 500 ECU to be divided over at least two years.

28. National aids

As is the case under the existing policy (Directive 72/159 on modernisation of farms) the new policy towards aid for on-farm investment is oriented towards certain types of farmers and certain types of investment. It is therefore considered necessary to ensure that Member States afford a certain degree of preference to those farmers benefiting from Community aid. For this reason controls must be placed on national aids. These controls can be summarised under three headings :

(i) Limits on national aids for farmers carrying out improvement plans

Farmers carrying out improvement plans may receive national aids in addition to the amounts provided for under the system of improvement plans for the purpose of

- . farm buildings
- . moving farm buildings in the public interest
- . land improvement operations.

These extra aids are subject to the general Treaty provisions on competition.

(ii) Limits on national aids for other farmers

In principle, aids to these farmers must be at least 1/4 lower than aids paid to farmers carrying out improvement plans, except for investments in saving energy and protection and improvement of the environment. In these exceptional cases aids may equal the eligible rates available under the system of farm improvement plans. As regards volume of aid, an overall investment limit of 60,000 ECU per farmer and 120,000 ECU per holding applies.

A general exception may, however, be made to these rules in the case of small farmers who may be granted transitional aids equal to the eligible rates available under the system of improvement plans and subject to a maximum investment level of 25,000 ECU.

(iii) General provisions

As regards national aids in general, the same prohibitions and restrictions apply as in the case of aids under the system of improvement plans with the following exceptions where national aids are permitted :

- . aid in the poultry sector for certain environmental purposes
- . aid for production of foie gras
- . aid for livestock purchase whether or not for first purchase.

In the milk sector an absolute limit on national aid of 40 cows per labour unit and per holding applies.

Finally, no specific controls, apart from the provisions on competition contained in Articles 92 to 94 of the Treaty, will apply to national aids for the purchase of land, for short-term management credits, for purchase of male breeding stock and for loan guarantees.

29. Education and training

With a view to providing systems of vocational training, in particular of farm youth, adapted to the requirements of modern agriculture, the existing provisions on farm training have been strengthened in the following respects :

- . an increase to 4,500 ECU in the maximum amount of eligible aid per participant in a training course
- . provision for special courses of at least 150 hours duration to enable young farmers to obtain the necessary professional qualification to benefit from the installation and additional investment aids
- . the introduction of aid of a maximum eligible amount of 400,000 ECU for the construction of training centres in disadvantaged areas
- . provision for financing by the Community of pilot demonstration projects to show farmers different types of farming systems, methods and techniques for achieving the objectives of the new aid system applicable to farm improvement plans
- . provision for Community financing of studies to assess the economic efficiency of the new policy and measures for the dissemination of the results of work done and experience gained as regards the improvement of agricultural structures.

30. Mountain and less-favoured areas

The measures aimed at strengthening the provisions of Directive 75/268/EEC are

- . an increase to 40,000 ECU in the level of investment which a farmer may undertake in tourist and craft activities in the context of a farm improvement plan
- . an increase to 20 in the number of dairy cows which may benefit from compensatory allowance (1) in less-favoured areas
- . provision for continued eligibility for compensatory allowances in respect of land which is newly afforested, for the first fifteen years following planting
- . an increase in aid for joint investment schemes for fodder production, including its storage and distribution and for the improvement and equipping of pastures farmed jointly. These investments may include drainage or small irrigation works including the installation of water storage basins and the construction or repair of shelters necessary for livestock herding in mountain areas.
The amount of eligible aid is a maximum of 100,000 ECU for collective investments; 500 ECU per hectare for pasture improvement and 5,000 ECU per hectare irrigated.
- . an increase to 4% in the total area of a Member State which may be classified as small less-favoured areas suffering from specific handicaps, taking account of the need to ensure the conservation of the environment.

31. Specific Regional Measures

The new Regulation adapts a number of existing specific regional measures (1) to take account of the new provisions for on-farm investments.

Furthermore it provides a framework for the adoption of future specific regional measures to tackle serious structural or infrastructural handicaps facing agriculture and to stimulate agriculture as a whole in the regions concerned. Such measures will be adopted in harmony with any development schemes simultaneously undertaken in non-agricultural sectors and having regard to the needs of environmental protection.

(1) In order to avoid a reduction in terms of DM in the value of compensatory allowances paid in Germany as a result of the revaluation of the "green" DM with effect from 1 January 1985 the Council also decided to increase the maximum unit amount of compensatory allowance to 101 ECU.

(2) See footnote (2) on page 12.

32. Forestry development

Special aids for new forestry development and for the improvement of existing woodland on farms are provided for as part of the new policy in respect of "main occupation" farmers. Under this provision the Community will grant aid on the basis of 80 % of the cost of new developments and forest roads and 60 % of the cost of other works up to a total investment of 40,000 ECU per holding of which not more than 10,000 ECU may be for woodland improvements. For individual operations the following maximum eligible amounts are fixed :

- . 1,400 ECU per hectare for afforestation
- . 300 ECU per hectare for woodland improvements and provision of wind-breaks
- . 90 ECU per hectare equipped with fire breaks and water points
- . 14,400 ECU per kilometre for forest roads.

(2) Council Regulation (EEC) No 1820/80 for the stimulation of agricultural development in the less-favoured areas of the West of Ireland

Council Regulation (EEC) No 1938/81 on an integrated development programme for the Western Isles of Scotland

Council Regulation (EEC) No 1940/81 on an integrated development programme for the Department of Lozère

Council Regulation (EEC) No 1942/81 for the stimulation of agricultural development in the less-favoured areas of Northern Ireland

Council Regulation (EEC) No 1944/81 establishing a common measure for the adaptation and modernisation of the structure of production of beef veal, sheepmeat and goatmeat in Italy

Council Directive 81/527/EEC on the development of agriculture in the French Overseas Departments

Council Regulation (EEC) No 1975/82 on the acceleration of agricultural development in certain regions of Greece.

33. Environment

The new Regulation authorises Member States to introduce special national measures in environmentally sensitive zones in order to encourage production practices compatible with environmental objectives. In particular, aids may be paid to farmers who undertake to adopt farming practices which will maintain or improve the environment. The farmer must agree as a minimum condition not to intensify his production. Furthermore, the stocking density on the farm must be compatible with the specific local environmental requirements. These aids are subject to the conditions on competition contained in Articles 92 to 94 of the Treaty.

34. Processing and marketing of agricultural products

The amendment of Regulation (EEC) No 355/77 involves a number of adjustments aimed primarily at broadening and improving the content of the Regulation.

Following are the main changes :

- . The introduction of the possibility, in connection with projects for the processing of agricultural products, of granting aid for the purchase of certain equipment for the harvesting of basic products, provided that such purchases are profitable for agricultural producers and the costs involved represent only a limited proportion of the investment under the projects concerned;
- . confirmation of the need to create new and additional outlets for agricultural products by placing particular emphasis on programmes and projects relating to new processing techniques, pilot projects for the development of new products and by-products and for energy saving and recycling residues;
- . the relaxation of the eligibility criteria for projects relating to the processing of basic agricultural products into products not listed in Annex II to the EEC Treaty;
- . the introduction of provisions designed to take fuller account of economic trends in the execution of projects and to allow for financial difficulties which may arise for persons implementing projects due to inflation and/or high interest rates.

35. Financial provisions

(i) Efficiency Regulation

The Community will as a general rule reimburse 25 % of the eligible expenditure incurred by the Member States in applying the Regulation. However, in the following cases a 50 % rate will apply :

- . aids for investments under the system of farm improvement plans in less-favoured regions of the West of Ireland, Greece and the Mezzogiorno;
- . aids for young farmers;
- . compensatory allowances paid in the less-favoured regions of Greece, Ireland, Italy and the French Overseas Departments;
- . aids for joint investments in the less-favoured regions of Greece, Italy and the French Overseas Departments.

The estimated total contribution by the EAGGF guidance section during the period 1985-1989 is fixed at 1,988 MECU.

(ii) Regulation No 355/77

The Community aid granted towards the cost of projects will, as a general rule, be 25 %. However, other rates, as follows, will apply in certain cases :

- . 50 % for projects carried out in the regions of Greece (except Greater Athens), in the Mezzogiorno, in the less-favoured regions of the West of Ireland and in the French Overseas Departments;
- . 35 % for projects carried out in Languedoc-Roussillon and in the Departments of Vaucluse, Bouches-du-Rhône, Var, Ardèche and Drôme;
- . 10 % to 30 % (depending on the region and date of submission of the project) in respect of harvesting equipment.

The estimated contribution by the EAGGF guidance section during the period 1985-1989 is fixed at 1,343 MECU.

36. General Provisions

The Member States will have to adopt the necessary national measures (1) implementing the efficiency Regulation (2) by 30 September 1985 at the latest. In the meantime the existing policy Directives and related measures (3) will continue to apply. By way of exception, however, the prohibitions and restrictions of aid provided for in certain sectors apply from 1 April 1985.

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- (1) the system of farm improvement plans is a compulsory measure; the other Community financed measures provided for in the new Regulation are optional measures i.e. the Member States have the choice of implementing them or not.
 - (2) no national implementing measures are required for the amendment to Regulation (EEC) No 355/77 since this is a directly applicable measure.
 - (3) the efficiency Regulation extends the period of validity of Directives 72/159/EEC, 72/160/EEC, 72/161/EEC and related Decisions 76/402/EEC, 81/598/EEC and 82/438/EEC to 30 September 1985 with retroactive effect to 1 January 1985 to take account of the fact that these measures had previously been extended only up to 31 December 1984.

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