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INTRODUCTION

Early in April 1981, when the Council of Ministers approved the prices of agricultural products for the 1981/82 marketing year, it also approved a set of proposals concerning farm structures (1).

This marks an extremely important step forward in the development of the common policy on farm structures and indeed in that of the common agricultural policy itself.

This newsletter outlines the progress of and prospects for socio-structural policy in agriculture and its contribution to the achievement of the objectives of the common agricultural policy.

The objectives assigned to the CAP by the Treaty include that of increasing the productivity of farms by ensuring the optimum combination of the factors of production and that of making proper allowance for the social nature of farming, regional differences and the close links between agriculture and the general economy. These aims cannot be achieved without an effective common policy on structures.

Working out a common policy on agricultural structures

The development of the structures policy has been steady but slow. This can be explained by the fact that, in the initial period, Community action was concentrated on establishing a genuine common market by the common organization of the market for each main agricultural product.

1. As early as 1962, however, work had begun on developing a structures policy, although the beginnings were quite modest.

(1) See attached list of "common measures" approved by the Council.

Firstly, the Commission was entrusted with the task of coordinating national schemes for improving structures with a view to the eventual elimination of structural deficiencies and to the coordination of the structures policy with the agricultural markets policy, general economic policy and regional development policy. Secondly, it was agreed, when the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund was set up, that the Guidance Section of the Fund, which is the source of finance for the structures policy, should, as far as possible, be appropriated one third of the funds available for the "Guarantee" Section.

This meant in fact that the Community was opting for retention of the Member States' individual structures policies but with coordination along agreed general lines. At the same time it created a Community financial instrument, one function of which is to support practical measures having the same objects in view.

Community action in this field - i.e. measures taken by the EAGGF Guidance Section - was organized by Regulation No 17/64/EEC. The Regulation provided that, after a short transitional period, EEC financial assistance was to be granted in the framework of programmes designed to resolve the major structural problems arising in the Community. What actually happened, however, was that this type of assistance continued to be granted for almost ten years as a contribution towards the financing of individual projects sent in to the Commission by Member States.

There is no doubt that the financing of individual projects was extremely beneficial to the agricultural economy in the Member States and that numerous sectors in most regions, especially in the weaker ones, increased their productivity under these arrangements. It nevertheless remains true that in spite of all the precautions taken by the Commission, the money spent during that period was spread too wide and too thin and that the projects successfully implemented in the most difficult regions tended to be the least ambitious ones.

2. Towards the end of the Sixties it was clear that a decisive and lasting improvement in agricultural structures, especially as regards certain categories of farmers and certain regions, called for action that was more resolute, better organized and more closely dovetailed into the common agricultural policy.

For in spite of a substantial improvement, attributable to the prices and markets policy, farmers' incomes still fell well short of those enjoyed by persons in other occupations. Moreover, the gap between the various categories of farmers was tending to widen. Lastly, efforts made by less prosperous farmers to increase their income resulted in an increase in production which foreshadowed a build-up of surpluses on agricultural markets. Faced with this situation, the Commission presented to the Council in December 1968 a Memorandum on the Reform of Agriculture in which it set out the situation and suggested a plan for resolving the fundamental problems.

The Memorandum argued that, if the common agricultural policy was to succeed, there was a need for a fully-fledged policy on agricultural structures, implemented alongside and in conjunction with the prices and markets policy. It would be based on a speedy increase in farm productivity and on action to assist less-favoured Community regions.

3. As the Commission had expected, publication of the Memorandum was followed by a period of intensive study and discussion with Member States and the various private farmers' associations concerned.

During this period the Council adopted an important decision. Regulation (EEC) No 729/70 on the financing of the common agricultural policy provided that in future the financing of individual projects should give way to Community financing of "common measures" approved by the Council.

The stage was set for the introduction of a really effective Community policy on farm structures.

The policy itself was launched in April 1972 when the Council adopted the first socio-structural Directives on the modernization of farms (Directive 72/159/EEC), which were measures to encourage the cessation of farming and the reallocation of "utilized agricultural area" (UAA) for the purposes of structural improvement (Directive 72/160/EEC) and the improvement of the occupational skills of farmers (72/161/EEC). These Directives formed a unit. A large number of farms could become permanently profitable only by making investments spread out over a number of years, which they could not possibly finance without public aid. If the effect of this investment was to be a lasting one, farm structures would have to be improved. This was mainly a matter of farm sizes. Hence the need to encourage farmers, in appropriate cases, to leave the land and turn over their holdings to others who had real prospects of operating profitably. This progress towards an up-to-date type of farming could be achieved only if farmers were given the opportunity to become businessmen by acquiring further occupational training. At the same time, farmers who wished to cease farming should be in a position to take their decision with full knowledge of the facts, helped by an impartial but comprehensive socio-economic information service and, if necessary, be retrained for another job.

4. The approach adopted was a logical and valid one in the economic conditions then prevailing.

Circumstances decided otherwise. To start with, it transpired that the modernization required was beyond the reach of the weaker farms. In the less-favoured regions in particular, the poverty of the farmers and especially the occupational, administrative and economic environment proved formidable obstacles to any improvement in agricultural productivity. Secondly, the initial impact of the economic recession severely handicapped the application of the common policy on structures: the two factors essential for adjusting farm structures, namely, the occupational mobility of farmers and farm workers and the "mobility" of land itself were severely reduced or lost altogether.

In these conditions, the regional economic development policy failed to provide the agricultural structures policy with the support necessary for total success. The concrete results of the implementation of the 1972 Directives can thus be summed up as follows:

- in all Community regions, access to the more attractive system of modernization aid was easier for those farms which were already more prosperous;
- such modernization was often achieved not through any real change in farm structures but by increasingly intensive farming. The rise in production may well be helping to boost the present unwanted surpluses in certain products;
- in the Community's less-favoured areas, the results in terms of modernization have been far less satisfactory, either because of fundamental deficiencies or because there is simply nothing else for the farmers to do if they leave the land.

Despite an undeniable contribution to productivity improvement on a large number of farms, the 1972 structural policy Directives have not, for a number of reasons, succeeded in improving a sufficient number of farms, especially in areas which were already lagging behind the others at the outset.

5. It became apparent very quickly that, within the Community, the 1972 Directives by themselves could not solve the structural problems of the Community as a whole.

For this reason, additional measures under this policy were developed.

The Community formulated measures to enable farmers to reap a larger share of the ultimate price of their products. To meet this need, the Council adopted regulations on aid for setting up producer groups and associations thereof, and regulations have also been adopted on the improvement of the processing and marketing of agricultural products.

During this time, Community initiatives to help less-favoured areas were no less significant. In 1975, the Council adopted Directive 75/268/EEC on mountain and hill farming and farming in other less-favoured areas. This was a major new step in the common agricultural policy. Although it was taken within the framework of the structures policy, it recognized that farmers in these areas could not expect the same yields, and therefore financial results for their efforts, as those in other regions. Consequently they can now claim an allowance to compensate for the permanent natural handicap they have to contend with. At the same time their work helps to maintain the local economy.

In spite of the considerable improvement that the implementation of this measure meant for farm incomes, it remained obvious that these less-favoured areas also suffered from other drawbacks which prevented normal agricultural development. It is for this reason that a number of "common measures" were adopted simultaneously under the Mediterranean policy. The aim of these is to eliminate any shortcomings in structure and infrastructure which hinder all future agricultural development in the Mediterranean regions. The measures, now being implemented, also apply to Ireland and Northern Ireland.

6. Half-hearted action under the regionalized approach would have been useless or worse than useless. The Council, reviewing the results of the structural policy and the situation and outlook for agriculture in certain areas of the Community, therefore decided that the CAP needed a really fresh approach to structures policy, in that priority should be given to those regions which are not fully covered by other elements of the CAP or which have not achieved a sufficient degree of general economic development.

This is the essence of the Council decisions of 2 April 1981. At the end of prolonged and detailed debates at political and technical levels, the ministers agreed that the common policy for agricultural structures should play an important - and a multiple - role in the European integration process.

Firstly, improvement of agricultural productivity throughout the Community. Taking into account present circumstances, the policy must embrace the greatest possible number of farms, even those where such improvements may not entirely ensure the farms' future profitability.

At the same time, the fundamental aspects of the CAP must not be neglected - the structures policy must therefore be pursued without any undue aggravation of the difficulties hampering efforts to reconcile CAP objectives with current economic and financial objectives.

Thirdly, the socio-structural policy in agriculture is essentially intended to create, as quickly as possible, the conditions which will allow farmers in less-favoured areas to improve productivity and therefore their incomes. The measures recently decided are no longer confined to the removal of stumbling blocks, but are based on the problems and the prospects of agricultural development in less-favoured areas, and offer farmers a choice of measures to enable them to make a decisive step towards development.

Finally, the common policy for agricultural structures takes into account present constraints on general economic development in less-favoured areas. It includes the immediate goal of improvement in agriculture, often the only form of economic activity in these areas, but also at the same time introduces the concept of integrated development. The Council has decided that special agricultural schemes are to be introduced in three areas provided that they are accompanied by development action in other economic sectors through an integrated regional development programme.

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Without underestimating the importance of other stages in the common policy for agricultural structures, it is safe to say that the decisions of 2 April 1981 mark a decisive step forward and point the way clearly ahead. This package represents a "new deal" which must be developed and incorporated into the CAP in the coming years.

The future role of the common policy for agricultural structures

The common agricultural policy is being adjusted to the present and future requirements of the agricultural world and the Community's socio-structural policy for agriculture has an important contribution to make in this connection.

This has been broadly confirmed in decisions adopted recently by the Council. The aim of the policy on structures will be to establish conditions under which the productivity of agriculture can, in the long term, be improved on a lasting basis, without interfering with or nullifying, in the short and medium term, the efforts being made to adapt the CAP and without ignoring the needs and constraints generated by the crisis in the overall economy.

In normally-developed regions this means that the drive towards modernization should not be abandoned but that emphasis should be laid on the search for real productivity through a reduction or at the very least a slowdown in increasing production costs. Great care must therefore be taken not to sanction developments which increase productivity but cannot be justified by market demands.

The same principles apply to less-favoured regions, where schemes operated under the common socio-structural policy should act as catalysts triggering off improvement in agriculture and other economic sectors.

Two essential conditions must be fulfilled in the pursuit of this aim.

- Firstly, problems and prospects relating to development in certain areas should be identified and studied. On this basis a number of measures should be elaborated which will bring about, where possible, or at least encourage agricultural development, while making a contribution to development in the whole area.

- Secondly, the measures considered -- following this exercise -- as being indispensable must cover the entire range of action felt necessary for an improvement of incomes with a view to the development of agriculture. These cannot be restricted solely to the existing measures within the common agricultural structures policy. They must include associated and ancillary schemes such as forestry measures, they must concern investments made by the private and public sectors (and by public authorities), and they must cover the material, social and intellectual fields as well.

If the final aim is (to be) the improvement of agriculture in any given region, no really useful measure is to be discarded merely because there are legal or traditional objections.

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We have seen that the course of future action for the Community's socio-structural policy has been carefully studied and mapped out by the Council. All that remains therefore, is that farmers, their organizations and the governments see to it that the policy is rapidly and efficiently implemented in the interests of agriculture and the general economy of the Community.

I. "COMMON MEASURES" ADOPTED BY THE COUNCIL ON 28 APRIL 1980

1. Amendment of Council Directive 75/268/EEC of 28 April 1975 on mountain and hill farming and farming in certain less-favoured areas

The limit of the compensatory allowance is increased to 97 ECU. Farmers in the Mezzogiorno (including the islands) and in the French overseas departments, farming at least 2ha of UAA may apply for this allowance.

Restrictions concerning payment of the compensatory allowance for dairy cows do not now apply to the mountain and hill regions of Italy, which form part of the less-favoured areas falling within the terms of this Directive.

In the Mezzogiorno (including the islands), and in the West of Ireland, the rate of reimbursement of eligible expenditure by the EAGGF incurred under farm development plans and guidance premiums is now 50%. The rate of reimbursement is the same for expenditure relating to joint investment programmes for fodder production and to improvement and equipment programmes concerning common pasture or mountain grazing land in the Mezzogiorno, including the islands.

In Italy and Ireland the rate of reimbursement is 50%.

2. Agricultural development in the less-favoured regions of the West of Ireland

Ais is available for the improvement of public facilities in rural areas, land improvement, the guidance of farm production, the improvement of processing and marketing facilities, forestry development, the provision of training facilities and specialized support for farm advisory services.

The rate of reimbursement by the EAGGF of the eligible expenditure is fixed at 50%, except in the case of improvement of public facilities, for which it is 40%.

3. Development of sheep farming in Greenland

Aid may be granted for land improvement including the creation of access roads, the improvement and construction of buildings, the improvement of methods for keeping hay, the purchase of additional breeding stock, the improvement of the agricultural advisory service for the extension of slaughter capacity.

The rate of reimbursement of the eligible expenditure by the EAGGF is fixed at 50% except for the improvement of access to reclaimed areas, for which it is 40%.

II. "COMMON MEASURES" ADOPTED BY THE COUNCIL ON 2 APRIL 1981

1. Amendment of Council Directive 72/159/EEC, of 17 April 1972 on the modernization of farms

The conditions for approval of farm development plans have been relaxed; special aid is available to young farmers who implement a farm development plan within five years after starting operations; the provisional system of national aid for farmers who are unable to present a farm development plan has now been made permanent, but there is a limit on the level of investment.

2. Restriction of investment aids for milk production

Aid granted under farm development plans is to be limited to the investment required for the achievement of a comparable income for 1.5 MWU per farm on the condition that the number of dairy cows does not exceed 40 per MWU or more than 15% at the end of the development plan (MWU = Man-Work Unit).

For farmers who are unable to present a development plan, investment aid may be granted provided that the investment does not increase the number of dairy cows to more than 40 per farm.

3. Restriction of investment aids in pig farming

Aid is limited to the volume of investments necessary to attain 550 pig places per farm. In specific cases where the number of pigs accommodated will not provide a comparable income for 1.5 MWU, the investment ceiling may be adjusted as long as no aid is granted for that part of the investment which brings the number of pig places to more than 1000.

4. Amendment of Council Directive 72/161/EEC, of 17 April 1972, concerning the provision of socio-economic guidance for and the acquisition of occupational skills by persons engaged in agriculture

A system of special aid has been set up for training managers of cooperatives and producer groups in those areas where such training proves clearly to be necessary. The eligible expenditure for persons engaged in agriculture taking part in vocational training courses has been increased by 60%.

5. Adaptation and modernization of the structure of production of beef and veal, sheepmeat and goatmeat in Italy

Aid may be granted, for the modernization, rationalization and construction of livestock housing on holdings implementing a development plan. Aid also covers purchase of machinery for fodder production and for the improvement of meadows, pastures and enclosures.

Special premiums may be allocated for calves for slaughter and for calves resulting from a cross with a beef breed which are kept for at least 12 months on the holding of origin or on cooperative holdings. An additional premium may be granted, over a period of 5 years for cows of beef breed, provided they belong to herds of 3 to 20 head. The EAGGF is to reimburse 40% of the eligible expenditure.

6. Development of agriculture in the French overseas departments

Aid has been made available for collective irrigation operations, improvements to agricultural infrastructure, soil improvement, flood protection work, afforestation and measures to encourage meat production and crops for which there is adequate demand.

The EAGGF is to reimburse 40% of the eligible expenditure.

7. Development of agriculture in the less-favoured areas of Northern Ireland

Aid is available for the improvement of farm roads, land improvement and for launching a specific measure towards the orientation of agricultural production.

The EAGGF is to reimburse 40% of the eligible expenditure.

8. Improvement of the processing and marketing conditions in the feeding-stuffs sector in Northern Ireland

Aid is payable for the rationalization or development of facilities for storage, treatment, or processing of the products in the animal feed sector, including facilities located in harbours. Aid is also available for the improvement of marketing and for acquiring better knowledge of facts relating to the markets.

The EAGGF is to reimburse 50% of the eligible expenditure.

9. Improvement of public facilities in certain less-favoured agricultural areas of the Federal Republic of Germany

Aid may be allocated for water engineering operations in agriculture and for the construction and improvement of farm and local roads which are mainly used for agriculture and forestry.

The EAGGF is to reimburse 30% of the eligible expenditure.

10. Integrated development programmes

These programmes relate to the Western Isles of Scotland, the department of Lozère (France) and the less-favoured areas in the South-East of Belgium within the planning of Directive 75/268/EEC.

Aid is provided in order to finance measures of agricultural improvement undertaken under an integrated development programme.

The EAGGF is to reimburse 40% of the eligible expenditure for the Western Isles and Lozère and 35% for the South-East of Belgium.

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