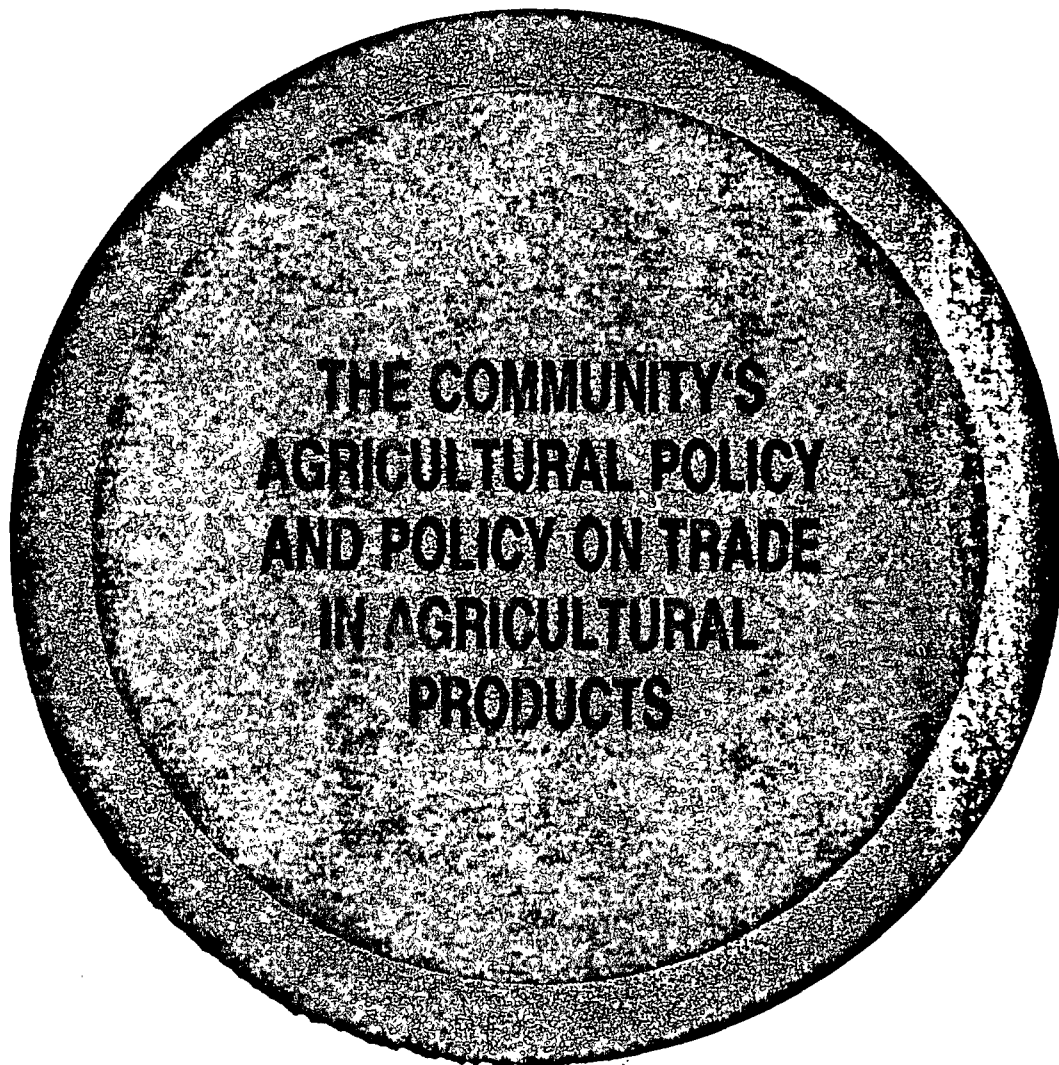


GREEN EUROPE

NEWSLETTER ON THE COMMON AGRICULTURAL POLICY



**THE COMMUNITY'S
AGRICULTURAL POLICY
AND POLICY ON TRADE
IN AGRICULTURAL
PRODUCTS**

A separate chapter of the Commission's Report on "The agricultural situation in the Community" (1) in 1981 is devoted to the Community's agricultural policy and policy on trade in agricultural products. In view of their economic importance we are reprinting the complete text in question in this issue of "Green Europe".

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Agricultural policy and policy on external trade

A new approach

The Treaty of Rome makes specific provision for a common policy with regard to agricultural products. The practical framework for implementation of the policy has been provided by common organizations of agricultural markets, each organization being adapted to the specific characteristics of the product concerned. It is also in the area of the Community's agricultural policy that the Community's common general policy on external trade (known as the 'common commercial policy') was implemented properly for the first time, as soon as the organizations were set up. Operating a single Community system for trade with the rest of the world, the new arrangements superseded all existing arrangements previously in force in Member States, including quantitative restriction. The aim of the single system is:

- to protect the Community agricultural prices against cheaper imports, while
- enabling Community merchants to take part in world trade, by claiming export refunds.

International commitments are, of course, respected.

The instruments used to regulate trade between the Community and non-member countries are essentially only three in number: levies, customs duties, and refunds. Levies are chargeable on imports, or (less frequently) on exports; duties are chargeable on imports; and refunds are claimable on exports.

The import levies — related to the prices to be maintained within the Community — are designed to cushion the impact of price fluctuations on world markets and thus to help stabilize the EEC markets. The levy is therefore a variable charge and its role is not comparable to that of a customs duty: if the world price of a product is running at the Community threshold price or above, the levy will be zero. This shows that beyond a minimum threshold at which interests of European producers are safeguarded, the interests of European consumers will prevail, since, at this level, imports from non-member countries enter the Community levy-free.

However, the system allows for even greater flexibility, in that, if world prices are higher than threshold prices, the Community can set up levies on its own exports so as to prevent European agricultural products 'leaking' onto world markets and thus to ensure reasonable prices for the goods sold to consumers at home. This has been done in the past for several products (wheat, barley, maize, olive oil, sugar), but only for limited periods of time.

The Community has thus created, through the levy system, arrangements for trade with non-member countries which are non-discriminatory and neutral in their effect; in this way, they may influence trade flows only on the basis of the quantitative and qualitative needs of the Community in the agricultural field. If it is also remembered that imports have been liberalized (elimination of quantitative restrictions), it is easy to see that the Community's policy on external trade breaks new ground beyond anything previously operated by any of the Member States.

The export refunds are normally only the counterpart of the import levies. They are designed to bridge the gap between the internal price of a product and its world market price, so that the Community's agricultural products can be exported.

A last point to be noted concerning the arrangements for trade with non-member countries is that the various common organizations include provisions enabling the Community to adopt promptly in exceptional circumstances any measures needed to defend the Community market against serious disturbance. This is a safeguard clause which can only be activated in accordance with the relevant rules of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT).

Community preference

The fundamental principles underlying, but also limiting, the agricultural policy and policy on trade are set out in Articles 39 and 110 of the Treaty. Article 39 defines the agricultural objectives of the policy: increased productivity of agriculture, provision of fair incomes for farmers and farm workers, stabilization of markets, reliable supplies and reasonable prices for the consumer. But the policy on trade in agricultural products with its special features is also part of the general common commercial policy and, this being so, it must also 'contribute, in the common interest, to the harmonious development of world trade...' (Article 110).

The Community's agricultural objectives and objectives with regard to trade may, however, come into conflict. Accordingly, those implementing the agricultural policy often have to cope with the difficult task of achieving an equilibrium between the international obligations of the Community and the principles of the common agricultural policy.

One of these principles—and an important one—is the 'Community preference'. This is simply the Community's version of an approach adopted all over the world. It means in general that the agricultural production of a country (or, in the case of the common market, of the Community) enjoys priority on the home market over products imported from outside. Seen from another angle, the Community consumers must be able to obtain supplies from Community production on a preferential basis, wherever the products are grown in the Community.

This principle is a rule of universal application defended even by the countries producing and exporting agricultural products on a large scale.

The usual way of operating preferential arrangements for home-produced products consists in protection at the frontier in one form or another. Some non-member countries which are major net exporters of given products operate protective arrangements at frontiers such as customs duties, quantitative restrictions and even the actual prohibition of such imports. Cases in point are Australia with regard to sugar, and the United States and Canada for certain milk products.

The principle of Community preference is implemented, with respect to trade, by the charging, at varying levels according to product, of certain customs duties *vis-à-vis* non-member countries or by the establishment of threshold prices serving as a reference for the calculation of the levy, so as to ensure a trading advantage, often quite narrow, for Community producers.

Thus, the Community does accord its producers a legitimate Community preference, but there is no absolute protection of European agriculture, and the preference must be properly related to the Community's international obligations, taken as a whole.

International obligations

When the common agricultural policy was introduced, some non-member countries feared that their agricultural trade with the Community might suffer or might be halted altogether. It stands to reason that the creation of a single market in the Community has encouraged an expansion of Community trade which has sometimes encroached on imports of some products from non-member countries. These changes in trade flows are the logical—and indeed the inevitable—outcome of the creation of a customs union.

Despite these developments, the Community has remained the largest world importer of agricultural products. And the arrangements for Community trade with non-member countries in agricultural products were made in compliance with the international obligations assumed by the various member countries of the EEC and by the Community as such, including the requirements of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT).

The Common Customs Tariff, which is the legislative instrument codifying measures applying to imports into the EEC of any product entering into international trade, reflects the entire picture of EEC commitments to other GATT partners. The 'conventional' duties in the Tariff—i.e. duties that are covered by agreements or conventions—express the concessions granted by the EEC in the form of 'bindings'. For a number of 'unbound' agricultural products, the EEC is free to apply any import arrangements it deems fit.

The Common Customs Tariff as it now stands is the cumulative result of the various negotiations conducted by the EEC from its inception, and the freedom the EEC enjoys, in respect of certain products, for example the products subject to levies, has often been paid for in full by concessions in respect of other products of special interest to non-member countries.

The conclusion is that the Community's policy on trade in agricultural products is designed to achieve, in relations with developed countries, a trade-off of mutual advantages; the economies of the various countries complement each other in some respects at international level, and, in general, the Community policy turns this factor to good account.

As for relations with the developing countries, the Community's policy on trade in agricultural products encourages as fully as possible trade on the basis of complementary needs, but generally the principle of reciprocity is ignored.

It should, however, be borne in mind that in its various applications, the policy on trade in agricultural products must respect the objectives and the need for the proper operation of the common agricultural policy, particularly the Community preference. The preference requirement is, in its turn, limited by the Community's international obligations. These interdependent relationships fit into the overall equilibrium.

The common agricultural policy and trade negotiations

The problem at the outset

A review of the various multilateral negotiations in GATT since the war brings out clearly that the main objective has been very much the reduction of customs tariffs; agricultural products have always been included in these negotiations along with manufactures.

During these negotiations, the Community has entered into major commitments 'binding' the relatively liberal system arrangements for imports of important agricultural products, in particular oils and fats and cereal substitutes: either the duties applied are minimal or the products escape duty altogether.

It has sometimes been pointed out that the agricultural policies pursued by the various countries seldom rely on customs duties as the only, or even the main, instrument of defence — the governments operate a wide range of schemes which, not being open to negotiation, continue to underpin the expansion of the home agricultural industry by sheltering it from the impact of free competition at

world level. These policies are motivated by the role of agriculture as an industry providing essential goods and ensuring national independence with regard to food supplies.

Moreover, as the schemes and methods used for government intervention in agriculture vary very widely and are very numerous in the various countries, it is no easy matter to work out a method of negotiation which would cover all aspects and yet yield worthwhile result which would be comparable in quantitative terms for the purpose of assessing concessions.

Background

And yet the Community itself had made practical proposals for the achievement of a solution to the agricultural problem as soon as it was set up: it submitted to the other countries involved in the 'Kennedy Round' (concluded in 1967) a method of negotiation designed to introduce fuller cooperation as between agricultural policies for the purposes of boosting trade. The support policies pursued would be 'bound' and the world markets in main agricultural commodities organized. The Community's idea was that an international policy for agriculture should be implemented but the proposal was made at a time when there was no shortage of agricultural products and failed to elicit the endorsement of the other countries.

However, at the end of the negotiation, an international agreement on wheat was concluded which represented a first step forward towards the reorganization of world markets. A food aid convention was attached to this agreement.

The second major round of multilateral trade negotiations, the Tokyo Round (started in 1973 and concluded in 1979), led to explicit recognition of the special nature of the agricultural sector. This subsequently enabled an 'Agriculture' group to be set up within the negotiations.

The work of this group led to the establishment of an international arrangement for beef/veal, an agreement on milk products and the adoption of a new code on export subsidies, of special interest in respect of agricultural products. In addition, a number of bilateral agreements were signed for various agricultural products, and a list of tariff concessions concerning a wide range of other agricultural products was agreed.

Within GATT, the Community is involved in another category of multi-lateral negotiations, resulting from the creation of the common market and the enlargement of the market. The GATT rules (mainly Article XXIV (6)) require that whenever a customs union is set up or enlarged the situation should be reviewed in order to restore equilibrium with regard to concessions, as compared with the previous situation. Should it be found that the new arrangements as a whole established by the customs union entail a disadvantage for non-member countries, compensation must be provided. This is of course a complex and a delicate operation which the Community had to carry through when it was set up, again after the first enlargement and recently when Greece joined.

The import arrangements shown in the Common Customs Tariff are the result of the various negotiations conducted so far. The Tariff shows, for Community commitments, that nearly 70% of imports of agricultural products enter over bound duties, 20% of the total of this trade coming in duty-free. Among the products which are not bound, there are, in particular, the products subject to variable import levies, for which imports represent about 22% of all Community agricultural imports. It has already been mentioned that the EEC has 'paid' for the freedom it enjoys in these areas by concessions in other areas.

The Community's trade relations with non-member countries in agricultural products

A complex web of trade agreements

The commitments resulting from multilateral trade negotiations (in the form of tariff concessions of general application, international agreements and bilateral arrangements resulting from these negotiations) represent only part of the agricultural trade relations which the Community maintains with trading partners everywhere in the world. The number of these permanent contracts is very large and their range very wide.

Preferential bilateral agreements have been concluded with most of the Mediterranean countries in the form of association agreements or cooperation agreements.

Concessions in respect of agricultural products granted by the EEC include tariff reduction for fruit and vegetables timed as far as possible outside Community peak production periods. For other products such as wine, the tariff reduction is linked with compliance with a reference price.

For products subject to levies (for example olive oil) a special scheme is operated enabling exporting countries to enjoy an economic advantage by charging an export duty equivalent to the reduction in levy granted by the EEC.

The generalized preferences are the main feature of the autonomous trade arrangements established by the Community under the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

For the developing countries, this system allows a fairly large number of tariff reductions mainly in respect of a number of processed agricultural products. The Community led the developed world in implementing this arrangement as early as 1 July 1971.

Considerable progress has been made since then in widening the range of agricultural products included in the system, especially as regards tropical products. Special measures have been introduced for the least-developed countries, who now enjoy arrangements approaching free access with zero duty for their processed and semi-processed products and for some unprocessed products.

The Lomé Convention (between the Community and 61 developing countries) allows the admission into the Community of all products, including agricultural products, duty-free.

For some agricultural products subject to common organizations based on levies, the EEC grants more favourable arrangements by a reduction in the levy conveying an economic advantage to these countries. Thus, for beef/veal, the Community grants a reduction of 90% of the Community levy for a limited annual quota of 30 000 tonnes; this reduction has to be offset by an equivalent export duty charged by the supplier countries. The system gives these countries a commercial and an economic advantage. It both allows the Lomé Convention signatory States special privileges with regard to access to the common market and safeguards prices within the Community.

In addition, the same countries enjoy in their relations with the EEC the benefit of a special scheme designed to stabilize export income (Stabex) which also covers a number of agricultural products. Protocol No 7 to the Second Lomé

Convention includes a mutual purchase and delivery commitment for 1.3 million tonnes of sugar (white sugar value) at a guaranteed price equivalent to the internal price in the Community.

The agreements with the EFTA countries (European Free Trade Association) cover EEC relations with those countries which remained members of EFTA after the United Kingdom and Denmark joined the Community. They contain provisions allowing of the establishment of more favourable arrangements for imports into the EEC of processed agricultural products.

In addition, the Community has conceded a special levy scheme in favour of Switzerland, Austria and Sweden in respect of beef/veal, the effect of which has been to give these countries an economic advantage.

A bilateral agreement with Yugoslavia allows for the adjustment of the EEC import levy on baby-beef, for a fixed annual quantity.

Agreements on sheepmeat have recently been concluded with about 12 non-member countries and additions to these agreements are now being made. They contain voluntary restraint commitments for specified quantities, entered into by the countries exporting to the EEC, against an EEC concession of more favourable treatment of imports than that which would normally be the effect under the common organization.

Negotiations on manioc — the main exporters of which to the Community are Thailand and Indonesia — are now being conducted with a view to settling the problem of imports into the EEC of this product, which in recent years have grown large enough to jeopardize the Community cereals market: manioc, which comes into the Community over relatively low barriers, is being used more and more by European livestock farmers as a substitute for feed grain.

The Community's export policy with regard to agricultural products

The EEC countries have a long tradition of exports of agricultural products and make a major contribution to supplies on world markets. Events in the economic history of the last ten years in particular show that this is a role the Community must retain if the problems posed by the expansion of the world population, especially in developing countries, are to be solved.

The major international organizations working in the food and agriculture field have often stressed the need to avoid the emergence of shortages of essential goods, and this supports the view that the Community must remain a food exporter.

As world requirements develop and as the Community has achieved a degree of self-sufficiency in regard to a number of agricultural items, exports of agricultural products will in the future become an important factor in ensuring the continuity of the common agricultural policy. At the same time, the gap between internal prices and world market prices will probably get narrower.

The Community's trade in agricultural products with the rest of the world has grown steadily over the years, but there has been an overall deficit on the agricultural trade balance, which was 24 900 million ECU in 1979 and 22 700 million ECU in 1980.

The largest deficit is that on trade with the developing countries — it was 9 600 million ECU in 1980, of which 5 800 million ECU were accounted for by Latin America and 3 600 million ECU by the Lomé Convention countries. The deficit on trade with industrialized countries was 12 300 million ECU, of which 6 100 million ECU on trade with the United States of America, 1 300 million ECU on trade with Canada and 550 million ECU on trade with Australia. The deficit on agricultural trade with the State-trading countries ⁽¹⁾ was 790 million ECU.

EEC agricultural imports from non-member countries rose from 24 400 million ECU in 1973 to 42 200 million ECU in 1980, with an increase of 73%, of which:

<i>(million ECU)</i>					
Origin	1973	1978	1979	1980	Increase % 1980 (1973 = 100)
Industrialized countries	12 016	16 330	18 534	20 291	+ 68.9
Developing countries	10 013	17 136	18 734	18 768	+ 87.4
State-trading countries	2 174	2 651	2 874	3 152	+ 45.0

Source : Eurostat.

⁽¹⁾ Countries of Eastern Europe (including USSR) and Cuba, Vietnam, Mongolia, People's Republic of China and North Korea.

Problems connected with trade with the developing countries have been attracting more and more attention in the various international organizations. A summary, given below, of the arrangements applied by the Community to imports of agricultural products from these countries is illuminating. In 1979 the total value of these imports — generally free of quantitative restrictions — was 19 815 million ECU (= 100%), of which

(i) at nil CCT duty + preferential arrangements	11 734 m ECU (=59%)
(ii) at positive duties	6 636 m ECU (=34%)
(iii) attracting levies	1 445 m ECU (= 7%)

With regard to the leviable products, it should be noted that these are mainly cereals, rice, sugar and beef/veal, imports of which into the Community in 1979 from the developing countries (other than ACP countries) were as follows:

beef/veal:	131 m ECU
cereals:	227 m ECU
rice:	80 m ECU
sugar:	184 m ECU (including India under the ACP arrangement)

These figures make it clear that the EEC arrangements for imports of agricultural products from the developing countries are relatively liberal and open, the only general protection being represented by customs duties, the average incidence of which is low.

A result of this is that Community imports from the developing countries have been rising sharply. The developing countries' share in all Community imports has also been improving.

Conclusions

The common agricultural policy, while pursuing the internal objectives set for it by the Treaty of Rome, has made and is continuing to make a major contribution to the development of world trade in agricultural products.

The trade relations forged in a large number of ways, some of them quite new, with various groups of countries bear witness to the political will in the Community to press forward the expansion of agricultural products in trade whilst respecting legitimate mutual interests and at the same time giving special attention to the interests of the developing countries.

The EEC is open to all forms of international cooperation, and this policy facilitates efforts to solve the problems arising in relations between trading countries and particularly in North-South relations.

The further enlargement and consequent strengthening of the EEC by the accession of new member countries will also help to promote the development of more extensive international cooperation.

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