



European Commission
Directorate-general of Agriculture

Newsletter

ISSN 1560-1862

Forestry and the countryside

Responding to a request from the European Parliament, the Commission presented the Council and Parliament with its first strategy for the protection, sustainable management and development of forests in the Union on 18 November.*

Management of Europe's forests and woodlands is mainly a matter for Member States, but it raises several important issues for the Union in general and for rural areas in particular. The strategy is designed to complement national forestry programmes and maximise the implementation of Community schemes. It is inspired by international commitments arising, in particular, from the 1992 Rio Conference of the United Nations and various ministerial conferences on the protection of Europe's forests (including the one held in Lisbon in 1998 - see Newsletter No 1).

Multifunctionality & Diversity

The strategy highlights the multifunctionality of forests and woodlands. Apart from their commercial role they have major ecological and recreational importance. In this sector, the interests of forest owners and jobs created are closely linked to environmental measures to promote sustainability. We also need to take account of the natural diversity of Europe's forests and their fragmentation.

Community action

A wide range of measures is already available to the Community for putting this strategy into effect. The Commission's 'Agenda 2000' document calls for these schemes to be implemented and suggests new ways of improving the protection and socio-economic potential of forests, encouraging joint management via associations of forest owners and helping to resolve specific issues such as biodiversity, climatic change and the use of wood as a renewable source of energy. All these schemes are to be included in the new round of programmes for rural development, as well as in the pre-accession aid for future Member States (see Newsletter No 1).

The following is a list of Community schemes concerning of forestry and woodland management which form part of the structural measures under the CAP and rural development:

- woodland management in agriculture (afforestation of farmland - more than 500 000 ha between 1993 and 1997 - and development of forestry activities through aid to farmers);
- improved processing and marketing of forestry products (prior to industrial processing);
- regional schemes to develop woodlands in rural areas, through a wide range of economic, environmental and social measures.

The Community is also supporting a series of horizontal measures:

- specific protection and control activities (inventories of the state of health of forests, protection against forest fires, the European Forest Information and Communication System - Efics, etc.);
- research and development measures (competitiveness of the forestry sector and sustainable multifunctional development of forests).

Coordination is mainly the responsibility of the Standing Forestry Committee. The Commission also recently set up an Advisory Committee on Forestry and Cork, made up of representatives from the industry and intended to facilitate the exchange of information.

The Commission may consider further proposals in the future, such as an action plan for certification of sustainable forest management, with managers taking part on a voluntary basis and subject to the necessary transparency and fairness of measures.

* COM(98) 649 final

Forests in the European Union

Forests and woodlands cover 130 million ha in the Union, i.e. 36% of the total land area, with 87 million ha lending themselves to commercial exploitation. These forest areas, 65% of which are privately owned, consist mostly of plots of less than five hectares, and are shared among 12 million owners. The timber industry accounts for 10% of the Union's industrial output and provides direct employment for 2.2 million people.

Food for Russia

On 9 December the Commission responded to a request from the Russian authorities by presenting the Parliament and the Council with a draft proposal to supply free food from the European Union to Russia. The country is facing major shortages this winter, made worse by poor harvests and insufficient liquid funds. A total of one million tonnes of common wheat, 500 000 tonnes of rye of bread-making quality, 150 000 tonnes of frozen beef, 50 000 tonnes of skimmed-milk powder and 50 000 tonnes of milled rice will be drawn from intervention stores, while 100 000 tonnes of frozen pigmeat will be bought on the open market following a call for tenders. The scheme is mainly designed to help Russian regions that are experiencing acute food shortages. Moscow and St Petersburg are not among the recipient regions.

The net cost of the operation is set at ECU 400 million, to come from the EAGGF Guarantee Section budget. A precise estimate of the cost cannot be given, however, in view of the practical and logistical difficulties expected due to the cold weather. Mobilisation of the food will begin at the end of January and is expected

to be completed by the end of June. The food will be transported, on the basis of contracts drawn up after calls to tender, to seaports or land border posts, whichever is more appropriate, where the consignments will be handed over to the Russian authorities.

The food is to be sold at local market prices to avoid disrupting the Russian market. The proceeds from sales are to be paid into a special account managed by Russia's Ministry of Finance and used solely for funding social programmes. In the interests of transparency, a list is being published of the amounts of food supplied and the areas to which it is going. The Commission will also be ensuring that the Russian Federation takes every step to guarantee the correct implementation of the programme, and it may call on outside technical help to carry out controls, including independent checks made on Russian territory. The Court of Auditors may also make its own checks. Should any irregularities come to light, the Commission will be able to interrupt deliveries at any time after notifying the Russian authorities.

In brief

Antibiotics in animal feed

The Council adopted a Regulation on 15 December to ban the use of four antibiotics in animal feed: bacitracin zinc, spiramycin, virginiamycin and tylosine phosphate. Current studies show that resistance has developed to these substances and cross-resistance to substances from the same families in human medicine, with a danger that these resistances could be passed on to human beings. Acting in the light of recommendations from, in particular, the World Health Organisation, the Commission felt it was essential to safeguard the efficiency of human medicines and believed it had the necessary evidence to justify proposing this measure. The ban comes into effect on 1 January 1999, with a transitional period of six months allowed. However, this is a precautionary measure only, which will be reviewed before the end of 2000 on the basis of advice from the Scientific Steering Committee and the results of various research projects as well as of the surveillance programme to monitor microbial resistance in animals which was set up in 1998 with a major contribution from manufacturers of antibiotics. The four substances are used mainly in pigs and poultry and belong to a group of eight antibiotics which the Commission is still allowing to be used in animal feed under strict monitoring. The four others, therefore, can still be used as alternatives to the banned additives.

Pigmeat - additional measures

Following recent measures implemented to support the pigmeat market (see Newsletter No 4), the Commission decided on 17 November to introduce a special refund of ECU 70 per 100 kg for carcasses and major cuts exported to Russia. This measure came into effect on 23 November, its aim being to encourage substantial exports of pigmeat to Russia over the next weeks and months. The Union has also agreed with the Russian authorities that it will include 100 000 tonnes of pigmeat in the food programme for Russia (see previous article).

BSE in the United Kingdom - Commission decision

On 25 November the Commission formally adopted the mechanism which, once its proposed operation has been fully checked, is to be used to set a date for the resumption of exports from the United Kingdom of deboned beef from animals aged between six and thirty months born after 1 August 1996. The mechanism includes strict conditions on the survival of mothers for six months after the birth of animals, the slaughter of offspring of sick animals, and the traceability of animals and meat (see Newsletter Nos 6 and 4 and Commission Decision 98/692/EC in OJ L 328 of 4 December 1998).



European Commission
Directorate-General of Agriculture (DG VI)

Editor: Stella ZERVOUDAKI, EC DG VI A.II.1. This publication does not necessarily express the official views of the Commission.
In collaboration with the Directorates of DG VI.
For further information: Rue de la Loi 200, B-1049 Bruxelles/Wetstraat 200, B-1049 Brussel - Belgium - Office: L/130-4/148A
Telephone: direct line (+32-2)295.32.40, exchange (+32-2)299.11.11. Fax: (+32-2)295.75.40
Telex: COMEU B 21877. Internet: <<http://europa.eu.int/comm/dg06/index.htm>>
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