



European Commission
Directorate-general of Agriculture

Newsletter

ISSN 1560-1862

Evaluation - a tool for rural development

As required by the Structural Fund programming for 1994-99, a mid-term review has been carried out of some horizontal programmes under Objective 5(a) (processing and marketing of products) and of some regionalised programmes under Objective 5(b) (development of less-favoured rural areas). The evaluation is briefly summarised below.

The immediate aim of this mid-term evaluation, which has been conducted by independent experts, is to enable the Monitoring Committees for the various programmes to make adjustments and, where required, to reallocate resources. It also paves the way for the final evaluation, when data are to be aggregated at EU level. A further goal is to improve methods of evaluation and to apply them widely as a basic programming tool. By making programme management more efficient, flexible and realistic and through the general lessons it provides for Community policies, evaluation can contribute to a better division of responsibilities between the Commission, the authorities in the Member States and the economic and social partners, as proposed in Agenda 2000.

Readjustments

The immediate aim has been achieved. For Objective 5(a), the evaluation has led to a reorganisation of programmes in most Member States. This has mainly involved strengthening measures, in line with market trends, in some sectors offering worthwhile development prospects and where future outlets can be identified. Emphasis has also been laid on the quality of agricultural products to meet the growing expectations of consumers in this field and to grasp the real commercial opportunities created. Many evaluation reports also point to the need to simplify procedures at both Community and national level.

As for Objective 5(b), in addition to problems of strategy, the evaluation has in many cases revealed the frequent start-up problems encountered in rural development programmes in declining areas which are often

sapped of their vitality. The exercise has helped to make such programmes more coherent, has brought them more into line with the situation on the ground, and has enabled public and private resources as a whole to be mobilised more effectively. The evaluators have also made many recommendations for improving all aspects of project management. In a good many cases, evaluation - which is quite an innovation for many local players - has had a galvanising effect, in particular on the public authorities, and it has often spurred them to tackle development issues in a more precise way and become more closely involved in the implementation of programmes.

Jobs in the countryside and quality of life

The information available at this stage is not sufficient to provide overall figures on impact. In brief, major concerns in the Objective 5(b) areas relate to employment and income from agriculture and other sources, as well as the quality of life, which is linked to maintaining and developing services in the countryside. Across all programmes, success is often due to the entrepreneurial spirit of farmers, whether this involves modernising holdings, the processing and marketing of products, or implementing a variety of rural development projects.

Lastly, take-up of the assistance has been affected by the late start, due partly to the time lost in 1993 during the negotiations on programming and partly to the time needed to set up decentralised structures. Financial implementation has subsequently accelerated, rising to a commitment rate of around 70% in late 1998, while payments (a good indicator of programme implementation) stand at 50%. Commitment of total appropriations can be forecast for the end of 1999 and all payments will have been made by the end of 2001. The Commission will continue to work with the competent authorities and programme managers to ensure that targets are achieved and it will support the appropriate measures where there has been a real effort to create the necessary leverage.

Olive oil

On 30 October, the Commission adopted detailed rules for applying the system of production aid for olive oil in the 1998/99, 1999/2000 and 2000/01 marketing years, together with transitional measures. Consumption aid and the distinction between aid for large and for small producers will cease in 1998/99, in particular because of inspection difficulties. On the other hand (see Newsletter No 2), the maximum guaranteed quantity (MGQ) for the Union as a whole is now higher and has been split up, for reasons of fairness, into several national guaranteed quantities (NGQ).

The new detailed rules state that inspections are to focus on the mills where the oil is pressed. The existing controls have been made more accurate and will compulsorily cover at least 30% of the mills. In addition, with the exception of smaller producers (less than

20 tonnes a year), mills will have to be equipped with a system for weighing olives that automatically records the results. When it leaves the mill, the oil will be delivered either prepackaged or with a document enabling the consignee to be identified. Olive growers collecting more than 200 litres of oil must be able to state where it will be sent. This will be checked in 10% of cases when mills are inspected.

Other rules cover the declarations of areas under cultivation, in particular with regard to new planting, and the introduction of a Geographical Information System (GIS) based on aerial photographs. The Commission has also laid down conditions governing aid for the production of table olives for those Member States requesting this (E, P and EL). This aid will take account of coefficients for olives to oil equivalence within the limit of the NGQ.

In brief

BSE: Portugal and the United Kingdom

The emergency measures adopted by the Commission on 18 November to deal with the risks of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) inside and outside Portugal entail a total embargo on exports of live bovine animals and certain other products of bovine origin (embryos and meat and bone meal - MBM), a nine-month ban on exports of meat and other products from bovine animals slaughtered in Portugal and provision for the introduction by the latter of a programme to step up the application of Community and national measures in this area (in particular, the withdrawal of specified risk material and a total ban on the use of MBM in animal feed). The Commission has also sent the Council a proposal for export arrangements which, once they have been adopted and their application has been checked, will mean that exports from the United Kingdom of boned meat of bovine animals and of certain products derived from bovine animals born after 1 August 1996 (see Newsletter No 4) can once more be authorised. This new proposal clarifies certain legal measures and takes account of the results of the inspection visit conducted in the UK last July.

Agricultural screening of future Member States

The preliminary discussions or 'screening' on agricultural issues in the first six countries applying for accession (Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia) started on 21 September and will last until the end of June 1999. The aim is to brief those States on the CAP and its scope and to allow the EU to assess their capacity to apply the *acquis communautaire* in agriculture and in particular to ensure it is properly implemented (intro-

duction of administrative structures and effective controls). A multilateral meeting providing general information and bilateral meetings will be organised on the following six topics: arable crops, fruit and vegetables; veterinary and plant-health legislation; financial rules (EAGGF and clearance of accounts) and structures; animal products; agricultural statistics, international agreements and general issues; specialised crops. As is the case for the other Community policies, the agriculture accession negotiations proper and consideration of any requests for derogations (transitional periods) can only start after the screening. For the other five applicant countries, the screening began on 10 November and at this stage involves multilateral meetings only.

Rural development: a new Community Initiative

An exhibition on sustainable rural development, organised by the European Network of Experiences in Sustainable Development in cooperation with the Commission, was held at the European Parliament in October. Commissioner Franz Fischler took the opportunity of outlining the future Community Initiative for rural development. Its aim is to ensure that rural communities are viable and to make the countryside more attractive. It follows on from Leader I and II and is based on the principles on which they were founded, namely support for small-scale development strategies involving pilot projects using a bottom-up approach, horizontal partnerships, networking and inter-regional cooperation. The local action groups will be selected under the responsibility of the Member States in accordance with strict criteria and a time limit will be set to speed up the launching of the Initiative.



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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.
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Printed on recycled paper.

CH-AA-98-006-EN-C