



European Commission  
Directorate-General for Agriculture

# Newsletter

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## Quality in all its aspects — a challenge for the CAP

**At a public hearing on 21 June before Parliament in Brussels<sup>(1)</sup>, Commissioner Franz Fischler reviewed the various aspects of the Community policy for quality in agriculture. Starting with food safety, he stressed the need for an integrated approach to production reflecting the interests and choices of consumers.**

For some years now, European consumers' choices have tended to favour healthier and more flavoursome food of higher nutritional value, produced by more environmentally friendly methods. The guiding principle behind this development is quality: in this complex concept, vital issues are at stake.

### A question of definition

According to an internationally acknowledged definition<sup>(2)</sup>, quality is a 'totality of characteristics of an entity that bear on its ability to satisfy stated and implied needs'. The Agriculture DG has set about classifying the various aspects of quality as it relates to agricultural products. Quality may be non-negotiable and compulsory, or relative and optional. **Food safety** is, of course, the prime condition for quality and a prerequisite for it. This is also true of compliance with legally established standards for the **environment** and **animal welfare** since they relate to the protection of natural resources and requirements of an ethical nature, in addition to the characteristics of the products. Although food's **nutritional value** is subject to rules on labelling, this is more relative, being linked to eating habits. Other aspects of quality are optional because they have a subjective component and depend on consumer preferences; there are, for instance, the **organoleptic** characteristics of products (flavour, smell and appearance). Some products also have an added **socioeconomic** value because they are produced in a particular region or by a traditional method (quality marks) or because their production methods pay special attention to the environment and animal welfare (e.g. organic farming).

### An area for legislating

The Community's legislative activity in this area is considerable, although it has been directed at very different levels depending on the type and urgency of the problems. Legislation in the food safety field started in the 1960s, grew more intense in the 1990s with the advent of the single market, and, since 1994, has focused on combating bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE). In other areas, one may quote the 1992 and 1999 CAP reforms, which emphasised agri-environmental measures and aid for extensification, and the introduction of European quality marks. Community legislation cannot and should not take over entirely from that of the Member States and attempt to cover all aspects of quality; rather, it should seek to work in tandem on pursuing a policy to foster quality.

### A challenge for the CAP and a topical issue

Taking up the challenges facing the CAP today implies gearing production to safety and quality while assuring producers' incomes (and thus a fair price for quality), the development of rural areas (which calls for the upgrading of local quality products and environmental protection) and the competitiveness of Community agriculture (and so defending the Community's quality policy). The White Paper on food safety<sup>(3)</sup> adopted by the Commission in early 2000 sets out 84 points for action covering the production chain as a whole with a view to a comprehensive and integrated approach to food safety 'from farm to table'. Lying at the heart of the CAP reform, quality in all its aspects has been the focal point of a wide-ranging debate on agriculture and food initiated by the Commission several months ago<sup>(4)</sup>; making that concept a reality means putting the Agenda 2000 guidelines into practice as effectively as possible, the goal being sustainable agriculture.

(1) *Speech/01/301 (available on the Agriculture DG's web site). On the points dealt with as a whole, see also Newsletters Nos 31 ('Moving towards sustainable agriculture'), 32 ('Focusing on food quality and safety'), 34 ('The CAP and the environment'), 4, 5 and 21 ('Community quality marks').*

(2) *ISO standard 8402-86.*

(3) *COM(1999) 0719 final.*

(4) *In the wake, in particular, of the Paris and Brussels conferences in July, a conference will take place in Athens on 10 September.*

## In brief

### □ Reform of the beef and veal sector

At the Council meeting on agriculture on 19 June, agreement was reached on the reform of the beef and veal sector on the basis of a compromise put forward by the Presidency and accepted by the Commission. With a view to a foreseeable temporary surplus of 350 000 to 500 000 tonnes in the second half of 2001, the reform seeks to restore balance in supply and demand through a number of changes<sup>(1)</sup> to the premium scheme that will enable production to be curbed and encourage extensive breeding methods.

- The maximum stocking density per hectare for entitlement to premiums for male bovine animals and suckler cows will be reduced to 1.9 livestock units (LU) in January 2002 and then to 1.8 LU in 2003 (instead of the 2 LU currently).
- The ceiling for entitlement to the special premium for young male bovine animals remains at 90 animals per holding and per age group, but the Member States will be able to alter or waive the ceiling on the basis of objective criteria taking account of the environment and employment under their rural development policies.
- The national ceilings for entitlement to special premiums for male bovine animals are to be reduced in 2002 and 2003 in line with the average number of payments made from 1997 to 1999.
- A minimum number of heifers has been set for entitlement to suckler-cow premiums in 2002 and 2003 – it must be equal to at least 15% but not more than 40% of the total number of eligible animals covered by premium applications; it does not apply to producers applying for fewer than 14 premiums and special provisions are laid down for the United Kingdom and Austria.
- The possibility of reallocating certain suckler-cow premium rights transferred to the national reserve is suspended in 2002 and 2003; specific provisions will apply to the United Kingdom.
- Buying-in is limited to 500 000 tonnes (instead of 350 000 tonnes) for 2001.

(1) For further information, see IP/01/875 at:  
<http://www.europa.eu.int/rapid/start/welcome.htm>.

### □ Olive-oil scheme extended to 2004

The Council meeting on agriculture of 19 June reached an agreement on a compromise presented by the Presidency and supported by the Commission to extend the current scheme for production aid for olive oil to 31 October 2004 (instead of 2003 as the Commission originally proposed<sup>(1)</sup>). The proposal sought to set up geographical information systems (GIS) in all the Member States. The other points in the decision concern the classification of oil (maintaining the current category

names 'virgin' and 'extra virgin' olive oil) and the setting-up of operators' organisations, which will be responsible to some extent for implementing and managing decisions on quality in the sector. The Council also noted the Commission's report on the quality strategy for olive oil and delivered its conclusions on certain aspects such as the designation of origin of oil (attributed to the country where the olives are both harvested and pressed), mixtures of olive oil with other oils (labelling rules) and the use of talc as an adjuvant in extraction (authorised under certain conditions).

Given the allegations of massive fraud in this sector, it should be pointed out that the system of controls<sup>(2)</sup> appears to be among the most stringent applied and the fraudulent practices identified are evidence neither that such practices are widespread nor – on the contrary – that checks are ineffective. The recent adoption of new marketing standards and the introduction of the GIS will enable further improvements to be made in the compiling of production data.

(1) See Newsletter No 31.

(2) See Newsletter No 11.

### □ Sapard: management entrusted to Estonia and first annual report

Following the decentralisation of management to Bulgaria on 15 May, Estonia was given the Commission's go-ahead on 3 July to take charge of managing its own Sapard (special accession programme for agriculture and rural development) scheme. The first advance to Estonia, paid on 18 July, amounted to EUR 3 024 459. Under this decentralised management, measures that can now be implemented in Estonia cover investments in holdings, improvements in processing and marketing (agriculture and fisheries), the diversification of agricultural activities and the strengthening of rural infrastructures.

On 3 July, the Commission also adopted the first annual report (2000) on Sapard<sup>(1)</sup>. It acknowledges the considerable administrative and legal progress made to date by the 10 applicant countries of central and eastern Europe (CEECs) towards setting up systems for implementing Sapard. It stresses the novel nature of this process – peculiar to Sapard – that seeks to devolve responsibility for management entirely to the CEECs, and which will prepare them for implementing other programmes on accession. The report describes, in particular, the preparation of the programmes (adopted by the Commission in autumn 2000), the phases in setting up the mechanism (financing agreements, national agencies), the 15 measures that can be financed, the planning of the budget and the financial allocation by country and by measure.

(1) COM(2001) 341 final.

