



European Commission
Directorate-General for Agriculture

Newsletter

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Mountains high on the agenda of the European Commission

'Our mountainous areas deserve special consideration at European level', said Franz Fischler, European Commissioner for Agriculture, Rural Development and Fisheries in his opening address to the seminar on 'EU policies and the mountain' held in Brussels in October, 2002. With the main topics including regional policy, the common agricultural policy (CAP), quality of life and transport infrastructure, the seminar provided an important occasion for dialogue on how EU policies can help to create new opportunities for mountainous areas.

Mountain ranges and chains make up approximately 30 % of EU territory and are inhabited by 30 million people. These mountainous areas include the Alps, the Sierra Nevada, the island of Crete, the Pyrenees, the Apennines, the Serra de Estrela, the Massif Central and the Highlands, and agriculture is of major importance to many of them. The decentralised approach in EU rural development policies is of particular benefit to mountainous areas, which can then choose the measures most suitable for them. 'Coming from a mountainous area myself, I am very well aware that these regions have to deal with very specific challenges', (1) said Mr Fischler, emphasising that the Commission's proposals under the mid-term review of the CAP will reinforce the existing mountain-friendly measures by increasing the support for rural development and less favoured areas (LFAs). 'First, we want to increase our support for rural development, and second, we plan to decouple direct support from production in order to improve the effectiveness of direct payments', said Fischler. New measures in the sphere of food quality and agri-environment will also have a positive impact on both agriculture and farmers in mountainous areas.

European Community support for mountainous areas has a history: as early as 1975, the EC introduced direct incomes support (compensatory allowances) for farmers in mountainous areas. Since then, Community rural development measures have been designed to target and assist mountainous regions, and have recently been strengthened.

The main support methods are:

- support for less favoured areas. Farmers are entitled to compensatory payments to ensure continued agricultural land use in less productive areas and increased investment assistance in these areas;
- agri-environment measures, which support agricultural production methods designed to protect the environment and maintain the countryside;
- forestry measures. Payments per hectare are provided to private owners, their associations or communal authorities for afforestation, prevention of physical risks such as erosion and avalanches and restoring forestry production potential damaged by natural disasters;
- so-called 'Article 33' (2) measures. These include, for example, off-farm diversification, protection of rural heritage and the environment or land improvement;
- the Community initiative Leader+ (3), which promotes innovative and integrated development strategies based on a bottom-up approach involving local actors.

These rural development programmes are tailor-made, and offer specific support to each area. Member States can — within the general framework defined by Community legislation — choose the measures that are most suitable for their territories. This same decentralised approach has also been used for the pre-accession programme Sapard (4).

The seminar was a major event in the calendar of the International Year of Mountains 2002 (5) and had been jointly organised by Franz Fischler, Commissioner responsible for agriculture and rural development and Michel Barnier, Commissioner responsible for regional policy and institutional reform. The Directorate-General for Agriculture financed this event by two-thirds. Nearly 500 delegates from the EU and the candidate countries, Members of the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions attended the event.

(1) See SPEECH/02/493: see <http://europa.eu.int/rapid/start/cgi/guesten.ksh?>

(2) For more information, see: <http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/en/treaties/selected/livre208.html>

(3) For more information, see: http://europa.eu.int/comm/agriculture/rur/leaderplus/index_en.htm

(4) Special accession programme for agriculture and rural development.

(5) For more information, see <http://www.mountains2002.org/media.html>

News in brief

o Greek 'feta' cheese to be a protected name

'Feta,' is a goat and sheep's milk cheese that can only be produced in certain areas of Greece, according to strict product specifications, following the adoption by the European Commission of the regulation on the registration of 'feta' as a protected designation of origin (PDO) in October ⁽¹⁾. This now means that producers in other Member States, subject to the fulfilment of certain conditions, have a maximum five-year transition period to change the name of their product or stop production altogether.

'Feta' had originally been registered as a PDO under Regulation (EEC) No 2081/92 ⁽²⁾ in 1996. Following objections from several Member States, the decision was subsequently annulled by the Court of Justice in 1999 on the basis that the Commission had paid insufficient attention to the situation existing in other Member States when assessing the possible generic character of the 'feta' designation. Following the Court's decision, the Commission subsequently invited Member States to provide exhaustive information on production, consumption and other available knowledge on the denomination of 'feta'. This information was passed on for examination by the Scientific Committee which unanimously concluded that 'feta' was not a generic designation. The proposal was submitted to the relevant regulatory committee of PDO/PGI for adoption in May 2002. In June 2002, due to the absence of opinion by the said committee, the proposal was transmitted for adoption to the Council ⁽³⁾. According to comitology procedure, the Council had three months to take a decision and, as there was no decision, the Commission formally adopted the regulation in October.

o Third World Congress of rural women

In all, 1 500 participants from 90 countries met at the Third World Congress of rural women, held in Madrid in October. Representatives met to exchange opinions and experiences on the good practice of agricultural policies and the creation of international networks for rural women. Amongst the principal themes discussed were the role of rural women, globalisation, food safety, access to natural and financial resources, international cooperation and development aid, information and new technologies, and multifunctionality. 'Women are the backbone of rural development worldwide,' said Franz Fischler, European Commissioner responsible for agriculture and rural development, in his address at the closing ceremony of the congress. 'The conference is an excellent opportunity to raise public awareness ⁽⁴⁾ and to take another step forward in recognising the role that women play in rural areas and rural development' he said, identifying the core challenges as employment, training and qualifications, services, and including women in the decision-making process. We should adapt training to women's needs and activities and address the problem that women who are active in family businesses and farms often have no professional status, independent remuneration, or separate social security.

Consisting of a series of workshops, plenary sessions and roundtables, this event is held every four years. The first congress was the initiative of a private farm businesswoman and took place in Melbourne, Australia in 1994 with the aim of bringing women together before the UN fourth world conference in Beijing in 1995. The Directorate-General for Agriculture was present throughout the conference.

(1) Commission Regulation (EC) No 1829/2002 of 14 October 2002.

(2) Council Regulation (EEC) No 2081/92 of 14 July 1992.

(3) See IP/02/866 of 14.6.02.

(4) See SPEECH/02/457 of 4.10.02 on <http://europa.eu.int/rapid/cgi/rapcgi.ksh>

