

EEAC

The network of
European Environmental Advisory Councils



STATEMENT

October 2002

A SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURAL POLICY FOR EUROPE

Statement by the European Environmental Advisory Councils

The following EEAC councils have endorsed this statement:

<i>Austria</i>	Austrian Association for Agricultural, Life Science and Environmental Research (ÖVAF)
<i>Belgium</i>	Environmental and Nature Council of Flanders (MiNa-Raad)
<i>Finland</i>	Finnish Council for Natural Resources (FCNR)
<i>France</i>	Commission on Sustainable Development (CFDD)
<i>Germany</i>	Council of Environmental Advisors (SRU)
<i>Hungary</i>	National Council on the Environment (NEC)
<i>Ireland</i>	Heritage Council of Ireland (HC)
<i>Netherlands</i>	Advisory Council for Research on Spatial Planning, Nature and Environment (RMNO) Council for the Rural Area (RLG)
<i>Poland</i>	State Environmental Council of Poland (PROS)
<i>Portugal</i>	Portuguese National Council on Environment and Sustainable Development (CNADS)
<i>Slovenia</i>	Council for Environmental Protection (CEPRS)
<i>United Kingdom</i>	Countryside Council for Wales (CCW) English Nature (EN) Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution (RCEP) Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) Sustainable Development Commission (SDC)

EEACs have long regarded the future of agricultural policy as a crucial issue for the European environment and for sustainable development. In preparation for the Mid-Term Review of Agenda 2000 the EEAC Agriculture Working Group undertook the study which led to a report, on the form that a sustainable agricultural policy for Europe should take, and this EEAC Statement, which summarises its key messages. The Statement was adopted by the EEAC network at its annual conference, held at Kilkenny (Ireland) in October 2002, as representing its common position on policies for agriculture and rural development. It has been endorsed by the 16 councils listed above.

The Working Group Report is available as background document. It represents the views of the Agriculture Working Group, and not necessarily a common position of the EEAC network. It provides a valuable analysis of the issues, and a fuller explanation of the points made in this statement. It also gives practical examples of the kinds of agri-environmental scheme now being operated in Member States.

European agriculture is at a crossroads. Now is the time to accept the overwhelming case for radical reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), and make a decisive start on that process.

Reform must be based on a new vision to give impetus and credibility to the European Model of multifunctional agriculture. The future for Europe's farmers does not lie in competing solely on the price of agricultural products.

The relationship between agriculture and the natural environment is of central importance. There is also an intimate relationship between agriculture and the rich cultures and traditions of Europe's peoples. The vision underlying reform must be for sustainable management of the whole countryside, and embrace the future quality of life of both rural and urban communities, as well as the beauty and diversity of landscapes and wildlife.

The purpose of agriculture can be defined as:

- providing people with food and non-food crops *and at the same time*
- providing other goods and services which
 - are vital for maintaining ecosystems in desirable states'
 - contribute to quality of life, cultural enrichment and diversification of the rural economy.

The adequacy of policies must be judged against ten basic principles for sustainable rural areas:

- (1) Conserving natural resources, especially soil, water, and biological productivity and diversity
- (2) Producing food and non-food crops sustainably to meet local and European needs, while also fulfilling obligations to the rest of the world
- (3) Promoting and safeguarding human and animal health
- (4) Maintaining viable rural communities with continuing links to the land
- (5) Applying environmental regulation and the 'polluter pays principle' to the agricultural and food industries in the same way as to other industries
- (6) Ensuring environmental benefits by giving farmers and other land managers fair rewards for supplying them
- (7) Encouraging the development and widespread adoption of innovative, less damaging forms of land management
- (8) Protecting and restoring diversity in land use within local areas in order to enhance amenity and biological diversity
- (9) Achieving the best local solutions in an increasingly diverse Europe through land management programmes drawn up at local level within a common framework of policy and accountability
- (10) Ensuring there are effective institutions at local and other levels which reflect the multiple functions of land management.

Some schemes already in operation in Member States illustrate how these principles can be applied.

Future EU policy for the integrated and sustainable development of rural areas must reflect the far-reaching changes they are undergoing and the decline in the importance of agriculture within rural economies, but recognise that land management by agriculture will remain central to long-term sustainability. Key indicators for agricultural sustainability should be introduced into the Lisbon Process, which aims to integrate social and economic policies within the EU by means of annual reports.

The methods used in agriculture should achieve an appropriate blend of profitability, management of natural resources and social wellbeing, and accept the reality of environmental constraints. Patterns of farming and food processing will vary to reflect environmental and cultural differences and the requirements of local markets. Decisions on what agricultural research to carry out should be taken in the light of open discussion of the social and environmental implications of particular technologies.

Creating the second pillar of the CAP was a significant advance, but it has received only a small proportion of total resources. Both pillars of the CAP and other EU rural programmes should ultimately be subsumed in an integrated policy in which the agricultural element should contain the following components:

- a baseline of minimum standards, maintained by legal regulation and in the short term by cross-compliance, to ensure that important environmental and cultural resources are protected from irreversible damage
- a payment per hectare offered to all farmers and other land managers, provided they agree to act as responsible stewards of a multifunctional countryside by providing employment and undertaking the work necessary to maintain natural and cultural diversity
- larger payments to those undertaking greater responsibilities, such as restoration of habitats.

The European Commission's proposals for the Mid-Term Review of Agenda 2000 could represent the decisive advance that is now needed towards sustainable policies. They would increase the resources available under the second pillar, strengthen the environmental safeguards under both pillars and go a long way to decouple support from commodity production.

Much will depend, however, on the detailed provisions of the legislation the Commission is now preparing, and the contents of the programmes which it will largely fall to national and sub-national bodies to draw up and implement. The European Environmental Advisory Councils stand ready to make a continuing contribution to policy at both levels.

The aim must now be to establish the right framework for agriculture to provide demonstrable public benefits on a locally determined basis within an appropriate model of accountability. The European Commission will retain a major role in funding a substantial proportion of expenditure and ensuring that Member States fulfil their obligations. The outcomes of the new policies must be carefully monitored and the European Environment Agency will have a central role in that.

The particular circumstances of new Member States in central and eastern Europe must be recognised. They have seen widespread damage caused by intensive forms of agriculture, but they also contain large areas where biological diversity and valued landscapes have been maintained through the use of traditional approaches, mainly by small farmers. Farmers in these states must be treated equitably in relation to those in present Member States, but there must be effective safeguards to prevent further damage to the environment, without erecting new barriers to progress towards sustainable agricultural policies. Special programmes will be needed to help small farmers in the new Member States to continue using extensive methods, while spending part of their time earning additional income outside agriculture.

Reform of the CAP is an essential element in reinforcing the EU's position within the World Trade Organization (WTO). However, international trade should make a positive contribution to sustainable development, in the EU and beyond, and contribute to the international targets for poverty reduction and other commitments made at the Rio + 10 conference in Johannesburg. If the safeguards needed to ensure that it will do so are not permissible under present WTO rules, the EU must press strongly for appropriate modifications to those rules before agreeing to new measures to liberalise trade in agricultural products.



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