

ARC Agricultural and Rural Convention

"A Communication from Civil Society to the European Union Institutions on the future Agricultural and Rural Policy"

November 2010

Summary

On 16 November 2010, a broad alliance of European civil society organisations and networks (ARC) will submit to the European Commission and other EU institutions its own proposals for a reform of European Agriculture and Rural Development Policies, called "A Communication from Civil Society on the future of Agricultural and Rural Policy". This Communication is a product of a process of six months of consultations, conferences and negotiations between NGOs from across Europe (see www.arc2020.eu).

We call for a radical review of policies for both agriculture and rural development. We propose that policies from 2014 onwards should embrace:

- A **paradigm shift in agriculture and in food systems**, from the existing dominant industrial-style farming and centralised food industry to sustainable farming everywhere and a diversified pattern of regional and local production and processing of food, with closer connections between farmers and consumers, and high care for public health, environment and animal welfare.
- An **economic, social and environmental renaissance of rural areas**, building upon the strength and diversity of communities, cultures and resources, linked effectively to place-based territorial development and honouring the EU's commitment to social, economic and territorial cohesion.

This vision for change is driven by a shared conviction that Europe must achieve sustainability and greater equity within Europe and in the world. We must make more responsible use of all global resources, halt the drastic loss of biodiversity, and radically reduce emissions of greenhouse gases. We must ensure food security, without the EU depending on the land resources of other continents. We must alleviate poverty and inequality, social exclusion and gross disparities of income and quality of life between regions and people within and beyond Europe.

A new European Policy

To meet these imperatives, we propose that the present CAP should be replaced from 2014 by a **Common Agriculture, Food and Rural Policy**, with objectives which go beyond those stated in the Treaty of Rome. These new objectives would embrace food security, food quality and public health, sustainable standards in agriculture, protection of the environment, mitigation of climate change, strengthening of the rural economy, and the well-being of rural communities.

This Policy would be implemented through two Funds, the **European Agricultural Fund** focused on food and farming; and the **European Rural Fund**, focused on the wider rural economy and territorial development. The Agricultural Fund would mainly contain horizontal measures, applicable to all territories: the Rural Fund would offer measures which are tailored to the needs of individual areas.

European Agricultural Fund

Our proposals for agriculture centre on a key demand - Sustainable farming everywhere. In our view, the current mainstream system of agriculture and the food industry in Europe is

unsustainable. It depends upon heavy use of fossil fuels, and long-distance transport of food and feedstuffs; wastes huge quantities of food; often fails to meet animal welfare standards; threatens the long-term health of soils, water resources and ecosystems; and causes continuing loss of farm employment. It draws the vitality away from poorer or more marginal farmlands.

We call for a progressive shift from industrialised agriculture towards sustainable farming, which, builds on the regional and local diversity of farming and economies, makes intelligent use of non-renewable resources, respects animal welfare, puts good agronomic sense and agro-ecological innovation at the heart of farming decisions, and achieves positive environmental, social and economic outcomes.

This shift must guide future support to farmers. General subsidies, unrelated to sustainable farming systems or public goods, cannot be politically justified. Support should reward sustainable practice and environmental stewardship. It should help small and family farms especially in difficult areas, enhancing diversification of farm economies and rural economies.

Therefore, the **future system of support to farmers** should provide for:

- clear definition of standards of sustainability in agriculture within updated codes of good practice, and progressive enforcement of these codes
- continuation of direct payments on a radically revised basis, with no reference to historical yields, equity between farmers in different parts of the EU, regressive, and conditional upon sustainable practices
- support for small and family farms, and for retention of the labour force, by linking the level of direct payments to the size of the farming enterprise and of the labour force.
- support for farmers in peripheral, mountainous and other less favoured areas
- prohibiting GMOs in European agriculture and food supplies
- financial support for transition into organic and ecologically-oriented farming systems

Further, we propose a system of **targeted payments for environmental services**, including:

- harmonised support, conditional upon clear environmental standards, to farmers, graziers, foresters and co-operatives who manage High Nature Value farmlands.
- agri-environment payments, to protect environmental values beyond what can be achieved by conditionality on the supports mentioned above.
- support for farming in Natura 2000 areas, where land management work is not covered by the supports mentioned above.
- support for carbon sequestration e.g. in wetlands, woodland or permanently unploughed pastures; and for conservation of High Nature Value woodlands which fall within the farm economy.
- support for investments in management of water resources, in adaptation of farming and forestry regimes to cope with climate change; and in on-farm habitat restoration.

Supporting these changes, we propose **new policies related to trade, aid, and food supply management**, to give fair return to farmers and to meet the demands of sustainability, including:

- re-negotiation of WTO rules to establish the right of food sovereignty
- separation of agriculture from other industries in world trade talks
- insistence on sustainable standards for food imports
- stimulus to production of animal-feed protein in Europe, as an alternative to protein imports
- ensuring coherence in development policies, including an end to subsidies on food exports
- support to farmers in developing countries to sustain or develop sustainable farm systems
- monitoring the food market and ensuring greater market transparency

- increasing the bargaining power of farmers and consumers, enabling them to manage food supply and achieve fair food prices

In response to the rising public awareness of **food quality and its links to health**, we propose that the Agricultural Fund should support:

- public information and education especially for children about food, diet and the link to health, sustainable lifestyles, responsible consumption and related issues.
- public procurement and catering for good-quality, natural, healthy, nutritious, animal welfare-friendly and regionally sourced food.
- tighter regulation of all food labelling, to ensure that consumers can understand the origin, production methods, processing treatment etc of all traded food.
- campaigns to cut food waste in all parts of the food chain.
- farmers to manage their own livestock breeding and seed production.

European Rural Fund

Many rural regions in Europe have been gravely weakened by collapse of collective farming, centralisation of commerce, out-migration of young people, etc. The result is growing disparity between regions, mass migration, loss of social capital, and in some regions abandonment of valuable farmland and loss of environmental and cultural values sustained by farming.

The proposed **rural renaissance** should focus on both economic and social development, on innovation and applied knowledge; and should draw upon wider EU policies and resources.

So, the Fund would contain these policies for **strengthening and diversifying the rural economy**:

- measures to facilitate access to land and capital for small and medium-sized enterprises
- support for farm successions and new entrants to farming, including support for retirement, for community-connected agriculture; and for action by local authorities to preserve locally-oriented sustainable agriculture in urban and peri-urban areas
- farm modernisation, to assist efficient production or the move towards sustainable practice or farm diversification
- increased EU interest in forestry, with a focus on creating jobs through sustainable woodland management, processing of woodland products and environmental services
- investment in telecommunications infrastructure in rural regions
- action by local communities, land managers and enterprises to create or extend enterprises focused on energy conservation or generation of renewable energy
- development of rural tourism, with its link to environment, added value etc.
- pre-career education and vocational training, apprenticeships and similar systems, mid-career training, advisory and extension services, peer-group activity etc.

This broad economic focus should include the following policies to support **regional and local production and processing of food**:

- creating and strengthening regional and local food systems, such as farmers' markets, cooperative farm shops, community-supported agriculture, and an active European network for exchange of good practice among these systems
- supporting branding and labeling of regional products, building on the EU quality scheme system (PDO/PGI/TSG) and drawing upon the great diversity around Europe in culinary tradition, gastronomy and related aspects of the cultural heritage
- review of EU regulations to permit properly justified and monitored exemptions from hygiene, slaughter and other regulations for micro-enterprises and SMEs.

The Rural Fund should also **strengthen rural communities, services and infrastructure**. This should include a dynamic and imaginative approach to development in so-called 'peripheral' or 'less favoured' areas, which, from the perspective of those who live there, may be central to their lives and highly favoured in cultural, environmental or other terms. Policies should include:

- strengthening social capital in rural areas, and the capacity of rural communities to participate in local governance and local development processes.
- providing and strengthening rural services and infrastructure.
- recognising the key role of towns as centres of social, cultural and economic life in many rural regions, and the need to sustain the range and quality of services and to ensure effective linkage and mutual support between urban and rural areas.
- a radical new approach to sustaining the social vitality of communities which are based on long-established patterns of subsistence and semi-subsistence farming.
- new and imaginative approaches to meeting the needs of the poor and vulnerable, building the collective confidence of these communities so that they can take initiative to improve the lives of their members.

We propose that the actions supported by the Rural Fund should be focused through integrated sub-regional development strategies designed and managed by multi-sectoral territorial partnerships.

Research, development, training and innovation

The new Common Agriculture, Food and Rural Policy should provide for:

- funding – through the 8th EU Framework Programme – for the applied research, development and innovation needed to pursue the policies that we advocate.
- vigorous programmes of information, training and exchange of ideas and good practice at EU and national level: in this process, the European Network for Rural Development and the National Rural Networks should play a much more dynamic and open role.

Governance, funding and delivery

The effectiveness of the policies proposed will depend greatly upon good governance and delivery as well as adequate funding. The new Common Agriculture, Food and Rural Policy should have broadly the same share of the EU budget as is now allocated to the current CAP. Rural areas should also draw resources from other EU Funds; national, regional and local authorities, and the corporate and civil sectors. The new Policy should provide for:

- an EU-level strategic framework for the Common Agriculture, Food and Rural Policy, fully harmonised with the Regional, Cohesion, Social and Fisheries Funds.
- Member States/ Regions should produce strategic frameworks reflecting the EU-level strategic framework, with complementarity between different Operational Programmes.
- sub-regional partnerships would prepare and implement territorial development strategies, with powers to deliver all relevant measures for all these five EU Funds, and specifically all measures within the proposed Rural Fund.
- active involvement of rural communities and their representative organisations in the shaping and implementation of development programmes at local and sub-regional level.

**This is a summary of a longer version of the Communication, which is published on the ARC website www.arc2020.eu