

The Agricultural and Rural Convention (ARC 2020): a platform of European organisations working together to develop the Common Agricultural Policy.

### Summary

The ARC (Agricultural and Rural Convention) is a platform of European organisations working together to develop the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

### Key words

International involvement, advocacy.

### Context

The ARC was established in 2009 with a view to reforming the CAP 2014-2020. Individuals involved in these discussions - notably within the Forum Synergies - then suggested establishing a new platform to discuss food and rural development issues.

### Partners

The ARC involved more than 150 organisations in 22 EU countries between 2010 and 2014.

### Activities

When the ARC was created, several European networks were already working to influence the EU agricultural policy in order to take better account of social, environmental, rural development and health issues. Many of these networks resembled farmers', environmentalists' and ruralists' organisations ... the ARC wanted to federate these stakeholders who were from different sectors but shared common beliefs. The aim was to create discussion and to coordinate these organisations in order to avoid sending the EU separate messages.

When the ARC was created, thematic workshops were established, as well as email exchanges and an



internet forum (which was active on certain questions and less active on others). In November 2010, two days of plenary discussion in Brussels resulted in a letter to civil society being drafted which was sent to Dacian Cioloș, the European Commissioner for Agriculture as well as to the president of the Agricultural Committee of the European Parliament.

Publication of the text has raised awareness of ARC 2020 and has led new organisations to join.

ARC's activities currently consist of:

- Lobbying work with the European Commission and the European Parliament;
- Mobilising civil society through campaigns such as 'Good food, good farming' in 2012 (organising markets, publishing and putting messages and photos online of European citizens) or 'Go Meet A Deputy' in 2013;
- The provision of information, through the website, on European and national news. A network of correspondents in several countries provide information.

Between 2010 and 2014, ARC was funded by several European and US foundations.



## Results and prospects

The ARC has contributed towards debate on the CAP and towards making it more accessible to European citizens by highlighting the practical issues of reform. Rather than highlighting the technical issues raised in specialised environments, ARC preferred to communicate about the issues, in particularly food-related issues, which affect citizens. The ARC team is responsible for 'translating' the aspirations of the organisations into proposals.

From 2009-2014, the presence of a European Commissioner for Agriculture opened a dialogue with civil society which facilitated ARC's work. Despite this, results are considered to have fallen below expectations, due to the weight of lobbying and action from Member States. Even although the vocabulary around the CAP has changed, reforms remain insufficient.

Getting organisations to discuss different thematic approaches has encountered some difficulties. For example, the 'rural' networks partly left ARC in 2010, claiming that insufficient progress had been made from the European Commission. In contrast, the international dimension is not the source of major disagreements between the participants, who share common ground around a community of perspectives.

### Comments

There are other European platforms whose aim is to influence the CAP. One of the particularities of the ARC is that it is cross-cutting on several themes: agriculture, food, the environment ...

In contrast, like all the other platforms, the ARC agenda has been defined by the European Union's decision making agenda: this is necessary for the consultation process and decision making processes to be synchronised. But it is also a difficulty, because the time that it takes to build a platform such as this on the European level is significant. Getting together, raising awareness, creating trust between the participants prior to any major European decisions: this takes around 5-7 years according to Samuel Féret, organiser of ARC.