



CAP post 2013: last call for sustainability?

NGO Briefing to the Informal meeting of EU Agriculture Ministers on September 22-23, Annecy, France

BirdLife International, EEB and PAN Europe welcome the initiative of the French Presidency for a debate on the future of the CAP after 2013. The timing, when the food and energy challenges are catching the headlines, could not have been better to debate the fundamentals of the CAP. The stakes are high and the consequences of the outcome of this debate will be far reaching. This puts an immense responsibility on the shoulders of both the French Presidency and the Agriculture Council to make the right choices on which direction to take, both with the short term decisions on the Health Check and the long term vision for the CAP after 2013. In this short paper we present you with a number of pointers about the direction we believe the EU should go.

Long term versus short term food security

Most politicians, when reacting to the recent spike in food prices have called for an immediate boost in agricultural output. This is a short-sighted and misplaced reaction that risks provoking long term damage to answer a short term market imbalance. What tends to get overlooked is that most measures currently deployed to boost yields deplete the very resource base on which agriculture depends. Continuing with a business as usual scenario of boosting yields through energy and input intensive agriculture which deplete and pollute precious water resources, deplete soil quality and drive species to extinction, is however not an option. The only realistic way to ensure long term food security and to avoid a real crisis is to ensure that agriculture's resource base of soil, water and biodiversity is effectively protected.

Start doing the right thing now:

Debating the CAP post 2013 does not mean we should stop making the right choices now under the Health Check. If we can't show the CAP is capable of addressing emerging challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss and water management, it will be exceedingly difficult to justify public payments to farmers through the CAP after 2013. The Commission proposals have been, by and large, a missed opportunity in doing this. Nevertheless they contained a number of proposals which indicate that a positive change is still possible.

These must be supported, showing courage and foresight rather than a focus on not upsetting vested interests.

Most importantly and crucially, the Council should agree to:

- ✓ **Increase modulation rates-** Environmental challenges cannot wait until after 2013. Rural development, while not being a perfect policy, does allow for targeted and efficient spending that is impossible under current pillar I.
- ✓ **Strengthen cross compliance and extend it to include water management and pesticide use-** It is unacceptable for public money to be spent on citizens or enterprises actively harming society's most basic interests. This is a key principle that cannot be sacrificed to bureaucratic "simplification". The credibility of any future CAP is at stake.
- ✓ **Do not start subsidising insurance schemes for dealing with well known risks-** "Risk management" sounds very appealing but risks being counterproductive. For EU farming to thrive, it must adapt to climate change by changing farmers cropping choices. If the risk of making the wrong choice is shouldered by taxpayers, farmers will have a perverse incentive to take greater risks, such as sowing water thirsty crops in drought prone areas.
- ✓ **Replace Set aside with a targeted environmental scheme-** It is scientifically well documented that the set aside scheme has been providing a lifeline to biodiversity in Europe's most intensively cropped regions, and has been delivering other important environmental benefits. Scrapping it, without introducing a targeted environmental tool will further undermine key EU environmental objectives and risks transforming whole regions into biological wastelands.

EU governments have the opportunity to show leadership and start addressing some of the most pressing problems of our time. If put on a sound reform road, the CAP can play a key role in dealing with the biodiversity and climate crisis, while helping secure Europe's long term food security. This would also re-legitimise the CAP as a useful policy offering value for taxpayers' money. The EU needs long term productive and sustainable agriculture that contributes to halting climate change and biodiversity decline while responding to consumers and citizens demands. The discussions at the Informal council are a good place to start from.

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