

Mrs Ritt Bjerregaard
Commissioner for the Environment and Nuclear Safety
Directorate-General XI
The European Commission
Rue de la Loi 200
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Environmental Aspects of the Agenda 2000 Proposals on Agriculture

Dear Commissioner Bjerregaard

As you may be aware, the European Environmental Advisory Councils attach great importance to the debate around the Commission's proposals in Agenda 2000 for reform of the Common Agricultural Policy. The purpose of this letter is to provide you with views of Councils from eight Member States on the key issues of importance for realising tangible benefits for the environment from the current reforms. I enclose a copy of the summary report of our work in this area. We hope our comments are of value to you prior to the Agriculture Council meeting later this month.

The European Environmental Advisory Councils welcome the Commission's intention to strengthen the environmental dimension of the Common Agricultural Policy and to develop policy measures which are appropriate for an environmentally sensitive and multifunctional form of agriculture. The Councils generally recognise that this, together with the new vision of rural development as the second pillar of the CAP, are important advances in the philosophy of agriculture policy in Europe. Integration across the environmental, social and economic dimensions of sustainability is vital. The Councils believe this new orientation is essential for ensuring that agriculture causes no further harm to the environment, but plays a positive part in delivering a sustainably managed and biologically rich countryside, and in maintaining the heritage of Europe's distinctive landscape.

I would like to highlight the following key points from the report which are fundamental to achieving the environmental thread of sustainability:

1. The provision on cross-compliance is generally welcomed by the Councils. This provision is necessary for achieving environmental goals. It is accepted that this will be a temporary measure while direct payments remain. Without environmental conditions being attached to continuing market support the prospect of further environmental degradation is high. Therefore there is strong support among the Councils for the proposal that there should be a clear obligation on Member States to introduce the necessary measures to achieve environmental goals.
2. The Councils believe that some of the money to become available under 'national envelopes' as part of the proposals for the beef and dairy regimes should be employed to support environmentally sensitive farming in these sectors.

3. It is regarded as essential that the proposed Rural Development Regulation is adequately funded and that it takes an integrated, holistic, approach. Councils support the proposal that LFA type payments should be available to farmers in areas of high conservation value, for example Natura 2000 sites, where there are constraints on production.
4. The Councils believe that the organic sector has a significant role to play in delivering environmental benefits from agriculture and recommend that further growth of the organic sector should be encouraged through the CAP as well as through national measures and market initiatives.

We therefore hope the Agriculture Council takes this opportunity to improve environmental integration within the CAP and recognises this as a significant step to meeting obligations under the Community Integration Strategy agreed at the Cardiff Summit last June. We have provided further comments on environmental integration into the agriculture sector as part of our submission to your Directorate's Global Assessment of the Fifth Environmental Action Programme. The Councils are, of course, willing to offer further advice. We are writing in similar terms to Commissioner Fischler.

Yours sincerely

Hubert David
Chairman
Focal Point for European Environmental Advisory Councils

Encl.: Summary report incl. Annex