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## **Conclusions on the COPA-COGECA seminar "Comprehensive environmental protection - The European model of agriculture", Brussels, 13-14 March 2008**

142 participants attended the seminar (first day 133 and second 124) and many member organisations were represented, in most cases by their environmental experts. However, it should be highlighted that nearly one third of the participants were non-members (NGOs, governmental representatives, EP etc.).

The COPA-COGECA Director for General Affairs, Mr. Paulo Gouveia, welcomed the speakers and the participants.

During her **opening speech** Mrs Dormal-Marino strengthened that important positive changes occurred in the agricultural sector concerning the environment, although a negative image of the sector still dominates many discussions and the public opinion. Therefore a better information of the public in large is important and needs to be further improved. Mrs Dormal-Marino considers that there are strong arguments for continued support for farmers, but also pointed out the need to rebalance the funds regarding the different parts of the CAP and the distribution between farmers.

**The first session** focused on the EU environmental legislation and its implementation at Member States level. After a general introduction of the state of play and the development of the environmental legislations (e.g. nitrates directive, NATURA 2000) within the EU, examples from member countries were presented. These presentations highlighted the different approaches of Member States. Whereas Denmark has a long history of environmental legislation related to farming activities, France strongly enforced its legislative framework during recent years and plans further actions in the coming years and Slovenia now tries to quickly meet EU legislation starting from a very traditional farming sector. All Member States representatives highlighted the big efforts of the last years and stressed that there will be further environmental demands from the society the farmers will have to meet.

Mr. Hamell from the DG Environment focused in his presentation on cross compliance as a very valuable tool. He pointed out that the environmental legislation is quite different in shape from the agricultural legislation. He called for early commitments and voluntary driven initiatives. He named the exemptions concerning the Nitrate Directive a "living experiment" to test to which degree intensive agriculture is still ecologically sustainable.

Mr. Shou from the Danish Environmental Protection Agency explained how Denmark implemented the EU environmental requirements. In Denmark there are four times as many pigs as there are inhabitants and water quality issues are of major importance. He outlined that in his country already in 1985 the first aquatic action plan was implemented and that there is a very strict environmental legislation, going even above EU requirements.

Mrs Hrustel showed how Slovenia as a very small country and new Member State adopted the EU legislation relevant for the agricultural sector. In order to meet the EU standards in Slovenia the implementation of the new environmental legislation is accompanied by education of the farmers. But as small farms dominate (average size 5 ha) there are many

partners to discuss with. Another challenge for Slovenia is that a large part of its territory is covered by less favored areas (LFA), about 50.000 farmers entered LFA schemes. At the beginning of 2008 every farmer has to be in full compliance with the nitrate directive. So far 35.5% of the country is under NATURA 2000, an awareness campaign for farmers runs. One important challenge is that the best land is used for non agricultural purposes.

Mr. Allain from the French Ministry of Agriculture explained that in France the environmental demands increased strongly over the last years and there is a significant improvement in environmental conditions. Environmental issues demand a high level of technical knowledge and are characterized by a plurality of actors: local governance and contract management are two key elements. Mr. Allain strengthened the importance of apprenticeship for the farmers to supplement environmental legislation. In order to reach the WFD targets near drinking water wells France will inaugurate a transitional period of 3 years of voluntary aides to farmers; afterwards the compliance will become obligatory. Mr. Allain mentioned the difficulty to determine common rules concerning environmental protection and to simultaneously take into account the specific local situations.

Two issues mentioned during the discussion that need further investigation are the costs to meet the environmental requirements at farm level, and the possible declination of organic matter in agricultural soils. Estimations concerning environmental costs lay between 3% of the total costs (Denmark) and 15% (Young Farmers representative). Soils could be used as carbon sink, this is closely linked to the portion of organic matter they contain.

During **the second session** best practice examples for sustainable farming respecting environmental issues were given. The presentations showed that there are possibilities to improve the environmental situation and that by its nature farming activities often simultaneously affect different natural resources. Not plugging in autumn, for example, helps to reduce nitrate leaching, but at the same time makes it necessary to do more tillage in spring. Another example mentioned is keeping cows in stables under controlled conditions to reduce methane emissions. This however affects the picture of the landscape as there are no longer grazing cows and pasture surface is reduced. The diversity of farming is one of the major characteristics for European Agriculture.

Mr. Temple pointed out that farming has to fit into a market context; only if so, the farming sector can deliver environmental benefits. Farms have the potential to become net energy exporters with small amounts generated at each farm. Sometimes contradictory legislation is a problem. In the United Kingdom, for example, the current legislation has very negative consequences for flood management (e.g. maintenance of drainage). Very positive experiences from voluntary approaches to reduce impacts from pesticide use were shown by Mr. Temple. Further more he raised awareness of the lack of young farmers in the future.

Mr. Schoonman focused on the development of the dairy sector in the Netherlands. Today the same amount of milk is produced (or even more) with 1.4 Mio. cows compared to 2 Mio. cows 20 years ago. The higher productivity has a positive effect on GHG emissions. Major improvements have been made in the nutrient management (N and P) by replacing manufactured fertilizer by organic fertilizer as well as by obtaining a higher efficiency in fertilizer use. Single farm payments linked to cross compliance are an important part of the farmer's income. It contributes to safeguarding the landscape and preserving the environment. Animal welfare is an important issue in the Netherlands where it is seen as a possible market advantage although it implies costs at farm level.

Mr. Gomes Crespo showed the evolution of his own sheep farm (complemented by pigs on meadow) that lead to a more environmental friendly farming system under an improved ecological sustainability during the last century. Traditionally the grasslands in Portugal are very poor and usually livestock feeding has to be supplemented by stubble, straw feed and feed concentrates. This leads to an expensive livestock production and at the same time to a degradation of the grassland. In order to avoid this, leguminous rich pastures were

established using seed inoculation with specific rhizobia. These pastures obtained under an improved pasture management already in the second year significant better yields and the organic matter in the soil increased at the same time. The improved pasture management contributes to sequestration of atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub>.

Mr. Valero gave an example of the complex and in many occasions successful interplay of farming activities and biodiversity. Biodiversity loss can be found in overexploited agro-ecosystems as well as in cases of land abandonment. A cooperative approach of farmers and other society members is essential to maintain biodiversity.

During the discussion it was mentioned that enhancing efficiency could be beneficial for the environment (e.g. fertilizer use efficiency). Farmers have to reach high productivity while at the same time meeting environmental demands. The bottom line for society demands to farmers is: farmers have to live from their activity. It was said that cross-compliance should not include climatic change nor Water Framework Directive issues. Farmers need advice, but must be free in taking their decisions. One main challenge in the New Member States is the question how to approach structural changes in an equilibrated way.

The COPA COGECA Secretary General, Mr. Pekka Pesonen, welcomed speakers and participants of **the third session**.

During the third session the central question was which incentives (and how many) farmers need to produce in an environmentally sustainable way. Closely connected to this question the justification of the CAP was discussed.

The point of view from DG Agri presented by Mr. Scheele is that the existing toolkit under the European legislation for pillar 1 and 2 of the CAP opens up many possibilities for action concerning environmental protection. However, it is essential to select the right instruments for the different issues (e.g. biodiversity, nutrient and water management). Positive incentives should only be paid for environmental targets that cannot be obtained without endangering a profitable production.

Mr. Brunner focused on the need to enhance environmental protection and stressed the fact that farmers play a key role as major land managers. He pointed out that the instruments under pillar 2 are the instruments of the future. Both environmental NGOs and the farming sector are concerned by and worried about land ceiling.

Mr. Leishman presented several success stories from the United States. Many efforts have been undertaken to reduce soil erosion. All conservation measures are voluntary. Other activities concern reimbursement of farmers for providing clean water, the implementation of methane digesters and afforestation. Mr. Leishman pointed out that US legislation is reactive, meaning that only if big problems occurred, new legislation is set up while in Europe especially environmental legislation is dominated by a precautionary principle.

The vice-chairman of the COPA-COGECA Working Group on Environment, Mr. Reinl, focused on the necessity of a Common Agricultural Policy with common rule and common financing in the EU 27. He asked for a coherent EU environmental legislation to meet the existing and arising challenges. He pointed out that special agreements must be allowed for hot spots, but he also mentioned the possibility of additional funding (e.g. donation) where positive examples already exist concerning biodiversity.