Agenda 2000: Review of the CAP and enlargement consequences

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The Committee has examined with interest the agricultural chapter of Agenda 2000. It regards it as an important basis for discussion of the future direction of CAP which, in the next ten years, will have to face problems stemming from the increase in the world's population, the accession of the CEEC, the establishment of a free trade area with the countries of the Mediterranean basin and the resumption of WTO negotiations. The ESC nevertheless wonders whether the proposed instruments under Agenda 2000 will be sufficiently effective to ensure that between now and the year 2006, European agriculture has the necessary competitiveness to take advantage of the positive trends on world markets. The ESC regrets that the Agenda 2000 objectives do not include equilibrium between production and regions in terms of land-use, the promotion of youth employment and the protection of wage-earning jobs in agriculture. An analysis of the sectoral proposals set out under Agenda 2000 has prompted the section to conclude that the proposals designed to reduce cereal and beef prices, abolish aid for silage maize, and introduce new measures for oilseeds and protein crops, go too far. As far as milk is concerned, Agenda 2000 does not eliminate the uncertainty currently facing producers about the future of this sector. The Committee regrets once more that the absence of proposals on the reform of common market regimes for Mediterranean crops and urges that particular attention be paid to farming in northern areas. As far as enlargement is concerned, the ESC would repeat the conviction already expressed by the Committee in previous opinions, namely that it will have a limited impact on CAP - at least until the year 2006. The CEEC will first and foremost require substantial assistance from Structural Funds in order to modernize their agriculture during the transitional periods needed to enable them to enter CAP and compete with EU-15 enterprises. The Committee finally reserves its position for the moment on the introduction of ceilings and the differentiation of aid until the Commission has come up with concrete proposals. The same is true in respect of the idea that aid should be made dependent on the application of environmental standards. The Committee warmly welcomes the proposals on the simplification of structural policy and the new rural development policy insofar as they are designed to be more efficient and less bureaucratic. The rural development policy nevertheless requires a more comprehensive approach which would take proper account of the many and varied possibilities of the Union's rural environment as well as the experience acquired in applying the European programmes (LEADER, ADAPT, etc.).