Raw tobacco: common organisation of the market COM

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OBJECTIVE: The Commission's report makes a number of proposals concerning future support measures for the tobacco industry. SUBSTANCE: The Commission considers that tobacco production is an activity in itself, fully comparable to other agricultural activities. It stresses that tobacco producers are to be found mostly in less-favoured regions where there are few alternatives to traditional occupations, and recalls that the raison d'être of the organization of the market is to support farmers, not to promote tobacco consumption. It nonetheless recognizes that tobacco consumption has harmful consequences for human health and that the Community aid to the sector is unfavourably perceived by certain sectors of public opinion and in some political milieux. In this context, the Commission has felt obliged to choose between two options: either to phase out support for tobacco production, or to continue it, but with radical changes. The option of disengaging the Community from the tobacco sector has been rejected: it would mean the disappearance of most of the Community's production in the medium term and the obligatory conversion of some 190 000 jobs. The social costs would be high and the effect on tobacco consumption nil. The Commission has therefore chosen to propose reforming the Community's support arrangements for producers. In the context of a continued Community commitment, any new measures should be aimed at encouraging the production of higher-quality tobacco. It is thus suggested that a proportion of the Community aid should vary on the basis of quality, in the context of the market price. This variation in Community aid should be complemented by measures making it easier for producers to leave the sector, e. g. by the buying-up of individual quotas. These reforms, taken together, would result in a higher quality of Community- produced tobacco and reduced exports of low-quality tobacco. The existing control measures, especially those concerning initial processors, should be reinforced. Under the proposed reform, the administration of the sector would be simplified and greater stress would be laid on environmental protection.