Forestry measures in agriculture: Community aid scheme (implem. regul. 2080/92/EEC). Report

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OBJECTIVE: to present a report on the application of Regulation (EEC) No 2080/92 instituting a Community aid scheme for forestry measures in agriculture. CONTENT: the Commission report is based on the results of the application of the regulation from 1993 to 1996, a limited period which does not allow any definitive conclusions to be drawn on the application of the regulation. The Commission notes that afforestation of farmland under the regulation was concentrated mainly in four countries: Spain, the United Kingdom, Ireland and Portugal. The area planted in these Member States in fact represented 81% of the total area planted in the European Union and 56% of the total number of beneficiaries. The regulation was therefore applied mainly in the Member States or regions where there was a political will to extend the forest area. In terms of area, over 65% of afforestation was in areas classified as fire-risk zones under Regulation (EEC) 2158/92 on protection of forests against fire. Afforestation of these zones is an efficient method of combating soil erosion and climatic change. After just three years of application, the Commission has made the following findings for each of the three policies to which the objectives of the regulation are linked: a) objectives in relation to the CAP: although afforestation has had little impact on the reduction of excessive agricultural production, its contribution to rural development should not be overlooked (dynamic approach to land use and maintenance of the countryside); b) objectives in relation to environmental policy: in order for afforestation to have a positive effect on the compatibility of management of the countryside with environmental equilibrium, several rules need to be respected with regard to the framework and conditions applicable to afforestation programmes, their location and the choice of planting methods. The programmes need to be amended and improved on this count in order to avoid non-respect or random interpretation of environmental conditions. Although afforestation has made a modest contribution in combating the greenhouse effect, the Commission considers that the policy of afforestation of farmland is an important factor in the overall environmental policy to which the European Union subscribed at the Rio Conference in 1992; c) objectives in relation to forestry policies: the Commission emphasizes that the Member States which apply a national afforestation policy have benefitted from the relative flexibility of the Community framework laid down in the regulation and have chosen options which are in line with this policy and concentrated either on the development of their wood-based industries or on the environmental and social functions of the woodland created. This applied in particular to Ireland and the United Kingdom.