Quality policy for agricultural products and agri-foodstuffs

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In adopting the report by Mr Jan MULDER (ELDR, NL) on quality policy for agricultural products and agri-foodstuffs, Parliament took the view that farmers should derive their income as far as possible from the market and that European quality policy could make a positive contribution to the conservation of the countryside and regional development. It acknowledged that the concept of 'quality' was a subjective one which could not be defined in a uniform way; it was of the opinion that European quality policy could not replace, but only complement and coordinate, existing national, regional and local quality policy. It was essential to support the development of organic farming practices, and Parliament called for a rapid extension of the rules governing this type of production to animal products. In particular, it called for the introduction of a European logo for organic products as a uniform means of drawing consumers' attention to the organic production methods of products. The introduction of such a logo should be accompanied by a European promotion programme. Bearing in mind the growth in quality marks, there was a need to adopt European legislation on the labelling of such products, in order to guarantee transparency for consumers. Quality marks recognised at a European level must satisfy strict and precise conditions, including voluntary participation in the scheme, technical details available for public inspection and independent monitoring, by a State body or an independent agency acting on the instructions of the State, at the cost of the interested parties. Parliament called on the Commission to: -evaluate procedures for granting Community protection to designations of origin and other traditional specialities and, if necessary, accelerate them provided that the relevant conditions were completely met; -study the potential for a European quality mark for the relevant agricultural products and foodstuffs, as a complement to existing national or regional quality marks; -do more to promote processing of quality products by means of knock-on financing; -ensure that better prices were paid for quality products and that producers benefited from special tax provisions, incorporating incentives, and organise promotion funds to encourage citizens of the European Union to consume more quality products; -uphold European quality policy in the context of the WTO and guarantee the quality and compliance with health standards of imported agricultural products on the European market, through equivalence agreements with commercial partners; -direct the market instruments provided for in sectoral COMs and structural provisions so as to assign priority to products which bore a quality mark recognized at European level. Parliament called for the establishment of a third European quality category based on environmental criteria in the broad sense of the term, and the adoption of a European code of good agricultural practice. This third category should simultaneously meet consumer demand for environmentally compatible foodstuffs and promote environmentally friendly farming. The label should be based on life cycle analyses of the product concerned which were valid for the various production methods employed in the EU.