Promotion of crops for non-food purposes

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report by Neil PARISH (EPP-ED, UK) on the promotion of crops for non-food purposes. The report highlighted the benefits of using renewable raw materials in various ways - including as a replacement for fossil energy sources - which could benefit the environment, offer new opportunities for modern farming and create new jobs in line with the Lisbon strategy. It pointed out that the recent CAP reform had created the conditions necessary for the development of non-food crops through decoupling, energy crops regime and set-aside land cultivation.

The committee made a series of recommendations to the Commission for developing the use of non-food crops, including: support for R&D in non-food crop technology; defining a Community Strategy and Action Plan to promote renewable energy sources while also guaranteeing the security of food supply in the EU; drawing up operational programmes to make use of biomass, to be jointly funded by the Structural Funds, the Cohesion Fund and the 7th research framework programme; reviewing the set-aside arrangements under the energy crops scheme and increasing the maximum area eligible for additional aid; extending the list of crops eligible for cultivation for biofuel production in the support systems; and promoting an internal market for renewable energy sources. MEPs stressed, however, that particular care should be taken to avoid any intensification of production which may have adverse effects on the environment (such as polluting the soil with fertiliser residues and depleting water resources), and said that the impact of energy crops on the rural environment should be monitored.

The committee also outlined the opportunities offered by "speciality crops" and products, i.e. environmentally-friendly speciality chemicals made from agricultural raw materials in place of non-biodegradable chemical products, pharmaceutical crops for making vaccines and other medical industry products, raw material for natural and hypo-allergenic cosmetics, natural textiles and novel food products. And it highlighted the potential offered by the use of agricultural residues and waste for the production of heat and electricity.

Lastly, MEPs wanted the targets laid down in Directive 2003/30/EC on biofuels (i.e. biofuel to constitute 5.75% of all transport fuel by 2010) to be made obligatory. At the same time they called for "qualified market access arrangements" for biofuel imports from third countries such as Brazil, arguing that it was necessary to safeguard the worldwide security of food supply, biodiversity and the CO2 absorption capacity of virgin forests through the targeted levying of duties and the promotion of rural development projects involving the sustainable use of resources in third countries. In this way, they said, it would be possible to maintain a competitive biofuel industry in the EU while applying high environmental standards.