Common agricultural policy CAP: information measures (Regulation (EC) No 1258/99)

1999/0209(CNS) - 13/06/2007 - Follow-up document

In 2000 the Council and Parliament approved new measures on information relating to the CAP. These provisions are enshrined in Council Regulation (EC) No 814/2000. To recall, the Regulation information measures on CAP are to:

- create a wider understanding of CAP;
- help implement and develop CAP;
- promote the European Model of Agriculture and to create a wider understanding thereof;
- provide better information to farmers on CAP and to those living in rural areas;
- raise public awareness of CAP objectives.

The is the second report on the implementation of the Regulation and covers the years 2003-2006. In summary the report makes the following findings:

Budget: EUR 6.5 million was made available, annually, for CAP information measures between 2003 and 2006. With the exception of 2006 the yearly budgets were significantly under-spent (execution reached 64% in 2003, 51% in 2004, 61% in 2005 and 98% in 2006). The limited uptake of the funding possibilities was due mainly to under-spending of the budget allocated to grants (largely because most applications contained errors or were of poor quality). Since 2006 calls for proposals have been significantly streamlined and the working clarified in order to help applicants avoid such errors. This approach is beginning to bear fruit and in 2006 an increase in the uptake took place.

Breakdown of actions financed: As far as grants are concerned, the Commission notes that it has made use of the budget line to co-finance a series of seminars, conferences, publications and exchange visits – all of which have helped to improve the level of CAP understanding amongst its target audience. In the reporting period 35 programme and 70 specific actions have been co-financed. Grants were awarded to 121 conference and seminars, 11 visits, 22 publications, 11 audiovisual productions and four web portals. As in the past many beneficiaries of the grants are located in Belgium where many EU socio-professional organisations have their headquarters. An important number of measures were also implemented in Italy and Spain, reflecting the ongoing high level of applications from these countries. Relatively few applications were received from the northern part of the then EU-15.

On the matter of actions that communicated information the report notes that there was a significant number of actions financed at the initiative of the Commission and which were often carried out with external technical assistance. Some 38% of the budget was earmarked for such measures in 2003 and 2004. This increased to 46% in 2004 and 57% for 2006. The organisation of conferences and seminars continued to be a key activity. Emphasis has been given to involving a broad range of civil society organisations in conferences and seminars. In January 2005 the Commission together with the European Parliament organised a conference with young farmers. In Vienna in 2006 a conference on the “Co-existence of genetically modified, conventional and organic crops – freedom of choice” was organised. In

other activities, the website on “Agriculture and Rural Development” has developed rapidly as an important source of specialist information of the CAP and there has been a significant to create greater transparency on CAP.

Lessons learned: In the reporting period 2003-2006, efforts to reach the general public were stepped up with a recognisable increase in professionalism in terms of devising appropriate messages and material. Participation at fairs increased. In terms of dissemination, a considerable number of co-financed actions did reach a wider audience beyond the immediate participants, thanks in large part to the multiplier effect of the specialised press and media. At the same time the report acknowledges that with limited financial resources it has been a challenge to reach all stakeholders in rural areas.

Interest from the general public has been low as is reflected in grants activities where very few projects involve organisations outside the world of agriculture. This in spite of the fact that the general public are a clearly identified target group. The Commission does add, however, that towards the end of the reporting period, uptake by non-agricultural organisations was on the increase.

As regards targeting rural areas, the evaluation notes that some actions, such as conferences and parts of the website have been particularly effective and dialogue with civil society has deepened. The evaluation report concludes that more focus needs to be given to dissemination within the local context. Information needs to reach the rural community as a whole rather than just the farming community. Overall, the recent external evaluation recommends that more focus must be given to a better definition of the target groups, their needs and appropriate dissemination strategies, in order to be more effective and in a bid to fulfil the Regulations’ stated objectives.

Communication Strategy for CAP: In line with the conclusions of the evaluation report, the Commission is proposing a strategy that includes:

- identifying target groups for information activities among the general public and stakeholders;
- clearly defined objectives and messages;
- increasing synergy between communication tools and other actors at EU, national, regional and local level; and
- systematic monitoring, evaluation and feedback.

The objectives are:

- to increase understanding and acceptance of CAP amongst the general public; and
- - to maintain and increase support from stakeholders in agriculture and rural areas.