

Recommendation 1048 (1987)¹

Consequences for agriculture of current soil degradation

Parliamentary Assembly

The Assembly,

1. Considering the large-scale, irreversible conversion of precious agricultural land to other purposes such as housing, industrial plants and roads ;
2. Believing that such land should be kept in agriculture as far as possible - or in such a state that it can be quickly reconverted to such use when needed - in order to maintain rural life, and as a safety measure in a world where food may eventually again become scarce ;
3. Concerned over the accelerating pollution of European soil through heavy metals, chemicals, acid rain and other sources, and fearing that this development, coupled with the permanent risk of radioactive contamination following nuclear accidents, presents a long-term danger to public health as well as to a viable agriculture ;
4. Alarmed at the rapid loss of topsoil around the world, due to population pressure and faulty agricultural and industrial practices - a development which in the next century could lead to worldwide food shortages,
5. Recommends that the Committee of Ministers call on the governments of member states :
 - a. to give new impetus to their soil protection policies by combining the quantitative aspect, that is the saving of agricultural land from disappearance or misuse, with the maintenance of soil quality in the face of pollution ;
 - b. to ensure, towards this end, that urban and industrial development is avoided, wherever feasible, on fertile soil, possibly by separating the agricultural land market from that of building land ;
 - c. to encourage a more prudent use of fertilisers, herbicides, pesticides and other chemicals in agriculture, to have crop rotation increasingly replace monoculture and, in general, to stimulate research aiming at a more quality- and environment-oriented farming, in response to evolving consumer preferences and present overproduction ;
 - d. in particular, to favour family farming - which is tied to the use of land and animal husbandry - over "industrial" agriculture, especially in the dairy and meat sectors, which often does not rely on locally produced feedstuffs ;
 - e. to avoid, in line with the Assembly's [Recommendation 966 \(1983\)](#), the application on to agricultural soil of such sewage sludge which contains unacceptable amounts of heavy metals and toxic chemicals, since this could in time have serious consequences for human health and agriculture ;
 - f. to encourage member states to move towards avoiding soil pollution from coal- and oil-fired power stations, which seriously affects forests, lakes and rivers, as dumped chemicals percolate from the soil ;
 - g. constantly to monitor soil, animal and fish life for possible radioactive contamination, and to establish common safety levels for all Council of Europe member states ;

1. Assembly debate on 27 January 1987 (22nd Sitting) (see [Doc. 5664](#), report of the Committee on Agriculture). Text adopted by the Assembly on 27 January 1987 (22nd Sitting).



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- h.* to take all appropriate protective measures against erosion damage arising from uncontrolled extraction of materials from rivers, causing the disappearance of agricultural land, threatening the stability of structures, lowering the groundwater level and making agriculture and its irrigation requirements still more problematic if not impossible ;
- i.* to draw up within the Council of Europe -preferably as part of the European Campaign for the Countryside - a convention for the protection of the soil, building on previous work in this field such as the 1972 European Soil Charter and the Assembly's [Recommendation 966 \(1983\)](#), on heavy metals in agricultural soil.