Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Recommendation 1049 (1987)[1]

European Agriculture 2000

Parliamentary Assembly

The Assembly,

1. Recalling its Conference ‘‘European Agriculture 2000", held in Villars-sur-Ollon, Switzerland, on 8 and 9 April 1986, to consider the prospects of farming in Council of Europe member countries up to and beyond the turn of the century ;

2. Drawing attention to the often-overlooked success of European agriculture in raising, since the second world war, production to unprecedented levels, and in ensuring consumers ample supplies of food of a wide variety and at reasonable prices, in the Council of Europe area in general as well as within the framework of the Common Agricultural Policy ;

3. Aware, on the other hand, that the industry is now threatened by its own accomplishments in the form of overproduction of several commodities, costly storage of surpluses, growing public expenditure on price guarantees, and large subsidies in exports to the Soviet Union, other East-bloc countries and elsewhere, constituting a massive transfer of wealth ;

4. Concerned that, unless action is taken, the situation will continue to deteriorate as a result of ‘‘automatic" productivity increases of 2 to 5% per year, depending on products and due to improvements in biotechnology, machinery, pesticides, fertilisers, etc. ;

5. Conscious that, with notable exceptions such as Africa, the rise in agricultural production is a world-wide phenomenon, leading to fierce competition for exports to markets in the Third World, and to a worsening political and trade climate between producers such as Western Europe and the United States ;

6. Recognising that large-scale exports to developing countries may actually destroy the latters' own food production capability by undercutting domestic prices and thus precipitating migration from rural areas to overcrowded cities ;

7. Drawing attention in this context to the forthcoming European public campaign on North-South interdependence and solidarity ;

8. Aware that European agriculture faces other problems such as the depopulation of rural areas, especially in remote mountainous and hilly regions, a desperate financial situation of small and medium-sized farmers in particular, great difficulties for young farmers wishing to enter the profession, an often irreversible disappearance of good farmland due to city and industrial expansion, and pollution of farmland from heavy metals, chemicals and, recently, radioactive fall-out ;

9. Recognising that some of today's intensive agriculture—while fulfilling an indispensable role for the maintenance of a living countryside and for the protection of the natural environment—may also sometimes be a burden for the latter by excessive amounts of manure in animal production and by the exaggerated use of artificial fertilisers, pesticides, etc. ;

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1. Assembly debate on 27 January 1987 (23rd Sitting) (see Doc. 5666, report of the Committee on Agriculture). Text adopted by the Assembly on 27 January 1987 (23rd Sitting).

10. Concerned about Europe's pronounced shortage of timber, with imports amounting to 60% of requirements in the European Community alone, and which is aggravated by the effects of ‘‘acid rain" as described in the Assembly's Recommendation 977 (1984),

11. Recommends that the Committee of Ministers urge governments of member states :

a. to restore as a matter of urgency the balance between supply and demand in surplus commodities, meaning cuts both in production and stocks, and including the possibility of taking farmland out of production in sectors where surplus productions occur while designating these farmlands for other purposes such as forestry, conservation of nature and landscape, and recreation ;

b. to implement such policies in close co-ordination, both between member states of the European Community and Council of Europe member countries outside it, and with other major producer nations within the framework of GATT and OECD, in order to avoid cut-throat competition for third markets as well as protectionist retaliation ;

c. to consider adjusting present price guarantees by giving an increased role to income-support systems and other forms of government aid, which take into account the farmer's role as a guardian of the environment and his essential contribution to rural life, in particular in disadvantaged regions where production is difficult ;

d. to consider whether a greater share of the burden of restrictions on production should principally be borne by the biggest farms - for instance through reduced price guarantees beyond certain production levels - since such farms would be the most capable of sustaining financial constraints, and since they are mainly responsible for creating present surpluses ;

e. to discourage, in this context, ‘‘factory-type agriculture" that has little connection with the use of agricultural land ;

f. to ensure that farmers receive their proper share of final food prices when compared with profits in the food processing and food distribution industries ;

g. to pay increased attention - now that quantitative goals have been met and surpassed - to the quality of food as reflected in nutrition value, purity, taste and texture, and to consider special incentives to encourage such production ;

h. to reduce the burden caused by certain forms of intensive agriculture to the environment, for instance by means of information campaigns to farmers or a special tax on artificial fertilisers to prevent them being used excessively ;

i. to prevent so-called ‘‘imitation products", of non-agricultural origin, from invading the food market and undercutting the efforts by farmers to achieve market balance ;

j. to assist farmers - wherever this does nothave a harmful impact on the landscape - in the planting of woodlands on marginal land, and in particular to cover their costs during the long period from investment to production ;

k. to encourage research into crops which can be used by industry or as a source of energy and which might replace or use commodities now in excess ;

l. to examine, in particular, whether Europe's pronounced dependency on imported animal feedstuffs could be lessened by the increased use of surplus commodities such as cereals ;

m. to make agricultural policies, and in particular the Common Agricultural Policy, more adaptable to the special needs of different regions and types of farming, while preserving the achievements of the Common Agricultural Policy in bringing about genuine Community integration and while taking into consideration the special characteristics of agriculture in the several member states of the Council of Europe ;

n. to maintain family farming as the dominant feature in European agriculture, seeing that it is vital for the maintenance of thriving rural communities and the protection of the environment.