Recommendation 1092 (1989)[1]

European agriculture as a supplier of raw materials and energy to industry - A way out of the crisis

Parliamentary Assembly

The Assembly,

1. Recalling its Recommendation 1049 (1987) on European Agriculture 2000, which, among its many proposals to reform the continent's troubled farming sector, also urged member governments to devote more attention to ‘‘crops which can be used by industry or as a source of energy, and which might replace or use commodities now in excess" ;

2. Building on the results of the Assembly's Conference ‘‘European Agriculture as an Industrial Supplier - A Way out of the Crisis ?", held in Munich in September 1988 with the participation of parliamentarians and representatives of governments, the European Community, international organisations, research, agriculture and industry from all over Europe and beyond ;

3. Realising that present agricultural policies will not - to the extent that they are characterised by over-production, inflexible price policies and land abandonment - be capable of sustaining a sufficient income to farmers, but that instead the social fabric of the countryside and the environment will undergo further deterioration ;

4. Convinced that European agriculture, apart from its main mission of producing food, also has a considerable, as yet untapped, potential in supplying dependable, price-competitive, high-quality renewable raw materials to the chemical, pharmaceutical, textile, packaging and other industries, as well as energy, both for its own operations and for society as a whole

5. Believing that this latter role will take on particular importance in the future, as inevitably the world's finite resources of oil become scarcer and more expensive ;

6. Recognising that laudable efforts to realise the above possibilities are undertaken separately by industry, agriculture and research institutions, but that these are doomed to failure in the absence of sufficient political support,

7. Recommends that the Committee of Ministers invite the governments of member states :

7.1. to provide a general framework, at national as well as European level, within which agriculture is able to become an important supplier of renewable raw materials and energy, and where it can form a long-term, dependable partnership with industry and research ;

7.2. to develop an overall plan for the furthering of renewable raw materials, in consultation with all the parties concerned (representatives of political life, agriculture, industry and research), and to put it into practice as soon as possible ;

1. Assembly debate on 30 January 1989 (18th Sitting) (see Doc. 5988Doc. 5988, report of the Committee on Agriculture, Rapporteur : Mr Niegel). Text adopted by the Assembly on 30 January 1989 (18th Sitting).

7.3. to ensure, for this purpose, sufficient long-term economic incentives to all the parties concerned - on the understanding that any initial financial assistance will soon become unnecessary as crops and processes are continuously improving, and seeing that such assistance would at any rate be far less costly than, and far preferable to, present agricultural expenditure on, for instance, set-aside programmes, storage of surpluses and export subsidies ;

7.4. to provide the same financial support for arable land used in ‘‘non-food" production as that given in set-aside programmes ;

7.5. to promote infrastructure investments needed for the collection, transport and processing of agriculturally produced raw materials and energy ;

7.6. to commit industry, which has an important role in this regard, to provide as soon as possible appropriate technical solutions allowing the use of plant oil as a diesel substitute, for instance in the form of mass-produced engines and plant oil-processing plants ;

7.7. to encourage, financially where necessary, both basic and applied research into new, better adapted energy and industrial plant varieties, and to develop new products and processes ;

7.8. to take every measure to ensure that the farming sector learns about the new plant varieties (professional training, actions at farm and branch level), and that corresponding marketing organisations are established which guarantee fair and appropriate prices to all the parties concerned ;

7.9. to start a host of widely spread pilot projects in every region, with the goal of speedily developing practical solutions which, although imperfect at first, can be continuously improved ;

7.10. to make obligatory, as a matter of urgency and as an initial step, the use of biodegradable, agriculturally produced plastics for making bags and other packaging materials ;

7.11. to introduce, on a general scale, petrol containing between 3% and 5% bio-ethanol, as such a measure would reduce dependence on fossil fuel, protect the environment and provide a new production outlet for European agriculture ;

7.12. to use low-quality firewood and biomass more extensively as a source of energy and heating ;

7.13. to replace the many laws and regulations which at present serve to hamper development of renewable energy and raw materials by flexible, non-discriminatory ones, or even, where necessary, to enact laws that discriminate in their favour, for the purpose of saving agriculture and the environment ;

7.14. to examine whether the knowledge gained as regards renewable raw materials can also be used for the benefit of developing countries.