



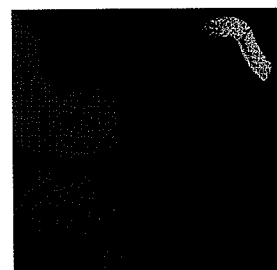
A statement by European Environmental Advisory Councils

Towards environmentally sustainable land use: reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and development of a rural sustainability policy



Environmental Advisory Councils from member states of the European Union (EU) emphasize the vital importance of making rapid progress towards more environmentally sustainable use of land across Europe. One implication of such a strategy is the need for further reform of the CAP. Consideration of reform and its likely environmental impacts is timely in view of the possible EU enlargement and the next World Trade Organisation (WTO) negotiations.

The undersigned Councils believe that urgent action is needed to sustain and enhance Europe's biodiversity and its natural and cultural landscapes. Agriculture holds one of the keys to reversing past biodiversity losses and reducing degradation of Europe's air, water and soil resources, thereby increasing the contribution of Europe's countryside to the quality of life of all its citizens, now and in the future. The importance of this was confirmed by the Ministers' Conference 'Environment for Europe' at Sofia in October 1995. We need a new policy framework that gives stability and predictability to help farmers to plan for the long-term and secure enduring environmental benefits.



Incorporation of sustainable development principles in agriculture and trade policies



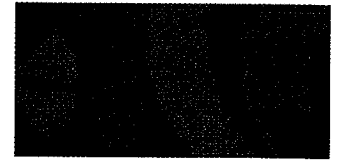
The Brundtland Commission called for sustainable development which meets the needs of this generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. To attain this far reaching goal an integrated rural policy is required which brings together economic, social and environmental objectives across all sectors. The wise use of non-renewable resources, including land, is a key principle for sustainable development. The Rio Accords set out principles of international co-operation which need to be applied in order to achieve more sustainable approaches. Such approaches should be stimulated throughout Europe. Land varies in quality and function. Large areas of Europe are of high value for biodiversity, landscape, and amenity; many remain semi-natural, some are suffering fragmentation. These areas also fulfil other ecological functions, such as sinks for carbon dioxide. They must be protected. Other areas of the countryside, including much farmed land, have the potential to contribute to the recovery of biodiversity and landscape values. This potential will be realised if all farmed land is managed in an environmentally sensitive way.

Maintaining the quality of the air, water and soil environments is another important component of sustainable development. Healthy functioning of the ecosystem is essential to human life and to wildlife. This requires the prevention of pollution at source. The practical implementation of the precautionary principle and the polluter pays principle should be applied to the agricultural sector. Full participation of Europe's citizens in the different levels of decision making is also required, for example, through the process of Local Agenda 21. The Dobris Assessment and the Fifth Environmental Action Plan of the EU underline the importance of these principles.

Sustainable development principles need to be incorporated and used in all decision making from international down to local levels. To give effect to these principles there must be a range of different instruments. It is of primary importance that relevant principles are embraced within world trade policies and in reforming the Common Agricultural Policy of the EU. It is vital that the future accession of Central and Eastern European countries to the EU is achieved in ways which while increasing overall prosperity, also safeguard existing environmental assets in these countries and contribute to environmental recovery across the enlarged EU. We advocate the development of specific environmental indicators of sustainable land use and the monitoring of progress. These must include explicit ecological objectives. Further research to determine standards appropriate to varying conditions is required.



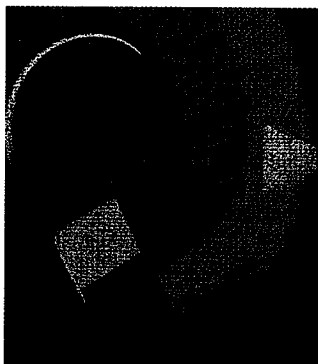
Development and delivery of an integrated rural sustainability policy across Europe



Pursuit of agricultural, environmental or regional development policy objectives in isolation will not deliver sustainable development. Approaches need to be complementary rather than conflicting. Actions that damage the environment should be avoided and strategic environmental assessments should be used to inform the design of policy measures. Implementation of policy needs to be more purposeful and effective by taking account of regional diversity in rural economies and being sensitive to local priorities. Decisions at all levels need to make a contribution to safeguarding the character of the different regions and areas of Europe.

It is important for the EU to develop more integrated approaches to policy development and to deploy financial resources in ways which will realise multiple objectives in rural areas simultaneously. This will require a re-orientation of EU funding more towards direct environmental payments. Research is required to develop policy instruments that promote integrated and sustainable rural development in a range of local and regional circumstances and trading conditions.

Reform of the CAP and the need to place environmental objectives at the heart of this policy



The 'reflections' paper, presented to the Madrid Conference by the EU Agriculture Commissioner, confirmed the need for further reform of the CAP. Sustainable development principles must be placed at the heart of any reform of the CAP. Integration of environmental objectives, alongside economic and social objectives is urgent. This is envisaged in Article 130r(2) of the Maastricht Treaty. The review of the implementation of the Fifth EU Environmental Action Programme shows little progress with such integration in the area of agricultural policy. Further measures are required. Amendment of Article 39 of the Treaty of Rome to embrace environmental objectives would give added impetus to this process.

Ubiquitous and unconditional support for agricultural production is no longer appropriate and should cease. There should be a re-orientation of support into environmental sensitive farming and an end to financial support for practices which lead to environmental degradation of land. Agriculture should meet basic environmental standards prescribed for the local circumstances. Further research is required to develop the basic environmental and ecological standards for sustainable use of land and into developing the best technologies that achieve them. Policies must be put in place to promote good environmental practice. Alongside the removal of production subsidies there should be a significant increase in the budgets for paying farmers and land managers consistently, for delivering environmental products and services with some security. Practical and innovative ways to do that at the right scale need to be found by building on the experience of implementing the EU (Agri-environment) Regulation 2078/92. Such policies would contribute to the enhancement of environmental quality across Europe, would help to sustain rural employment and be cost-effective.

Recommendations for action

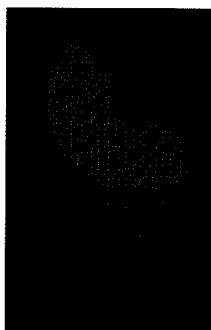
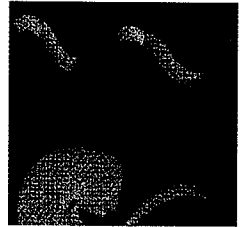
The Environmental Advisory Councils call on

The EU and EU member states -

- To work towards an integrated rural sustainability policy, incorporating sustainable development principles and delivered in such a way which sustains regional and local character.
- To incorporate environmental objectives explicitly at the heart of a reformed CAP.
- To shift significant resources from unconditional agricultural production support into the expansion of regional and local agri-environmental programmes to meet defined ecological targets.
- To ensure that farmers and land managers throughout Europe meet defined and measurable basic environmental standards of good practice, which reduce pollution, contribute to environmental enhancement and sustain critical natural capital.
- To investigate the re-orientation of EU funds and other instruments to achieve more environmentally sustainable land use.
- To use structural funds to support enhancement of areas where biodiversity and landscape features have been lost.
- To develop environmental indicators to monitor the progress made.

The WTO -

- To embrace sustainable development principles within trade policy.
- To take account of international obligations to conserve biodiversity within multi-lateral trade rules.
- To ensure that environmental assets and environmental carrying capacity are respected and progress is measured.




Follow-up action



As Environmental Advisory Councils we will work with similar Councils across Europe, promoting these recommendations with our governments and with all other relevant parties, in order to help achieve sustainable development which respects the environment. We will continue to carry out relevant research to underpin effective policy development and implementation.

Signatories


President, Austrian Association for Agricultural Research
Österreichische Vereinigung für Agrarwissenschaftliche Forschung **Austria**


Chairman, Scientific Council for Environmental Affairs
Wissenschaftlicher Beirat für Umweltfragen **Austria**


Chairman, English Nature **England**


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Chairman, Council for Environmental Advisors
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Chairman, Council for Countryside Conservation
Deutscher Rat für Landespflege **Germany**


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This is one of a range of publications published by
Communications and Grants Team, English Nature,
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