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COMMUNITY ACTION TO PROMOTE RURAL TOURISM

Communication from the Commission

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Summary

In all the Member States' economies, tourism (all categories included) is a key industry with one of the fastest growth rates. It accounts for around 5.5% of Community GDP, 8% of private expenditure and 4% of total external trade. It employs nearly 7.5 million people and provides 6% of total employment in the Community; it is a major - and, in some regions, growing - source of new jobs. However, the entire European tourist industry is currently having to cope with relatively sluggish overall growth (5% a year in Europe and 7% a year worldwide).

This trend can be attributed to the relative saturation of certain tourist areas, particularly those with longer tourist traditions, and to shifts in the demand for tourism, which are reflected in greater diversity in the way holidays are spent.

Tourism businesses in rural areas thus have opportunities open to them. Their ability to take advantage of those opportunities will be crucial to the future of tourism in Europe and to all Member States' economies. They are, however, faced with the challenge of satisfying a more demanding customer who is capable of expressing his needs and can afford to pick and choose. The Community can help such businesses take up the challenge.

A wide range of Community measures is already available to rural tourism businesses, in particular under the common agricultural policy (e.g. Regulation (EEC) No 797/85, as amended by Regulation (EEC) No 3808/89, and Regulations (EEC) Nos 1820/80 and 1401/86).

Under the Community's regional policy, around 5% of European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) resources was allocated between 1986 and 1988 to projects or programmes for developing tourism (with a greater percentage of resources being earmarked under certain initiatives, such as the IMPs). Following the reform of the structural Funds, the Community support frameworks include the promotion of tourism (5.5%, or ECU 1.6 billion, in the case of Objective 1, and 7%, or ECU 263 million, in the case of Objective 2) among non-agricultural measures. Most of the Community support frameworks for Objective 5(b) provide for the financing of investment in tourist facilities such as farm accommodation and the development of natural parks or sports complexes (golf, skiing, etc.).

Lastly, in the context of European Tourism Year (a testing-ground for new initiatives), projects drawn up at national and European level to assist rural tourism businesses are being supported.

Provided that certain geographical criteria are met, most of the investment required for the provision of tourist facilities qualifies for Community assistance. However, tourist amenities in rural areas are necessary but will not on their own be sufficient to accommodate on a lasting and expanding basis the demand for an integrated range of tourist products.

Measures to be taken by the Community must, therefore, be aimed at creating rural tourism products which can be marketed in such a way as to encourage the setting-up and development of businesses responsible for managing them.

Where consultation of the trade associations concerned confirms that they are necessary, these measures will be implemented in conjunction with operators in the industry and will focus on the following aims:

- to help define rural tourism products by improving information on demand for such products and enhancing the transparency of supply (support for the creation by operators of a quality label) and by harmonizing information on all the components of rural tourism products (system of appropriate symbols);
- to help with the creation and development of rural tourism products by improving information on, and access to, the Community aid schemes for rural tourism and by assisting the local authorities in their rural tourism role; by promoting cooperation between those involved locally (local authorities, firms, associations, etc.) and between developers of rural tourism products and suppliers of the necessary goods and services; lastly, by encouraging measures to streamline the management of rural tourism activities through support for training measures, exchanges and the setting-up of networks;
- to promote access to the market in rural tourism products by better customer information involving awareness of the facilities available at national level and their identification through the use of a system of European symbols; by encouraging improvements in the quality of rural tourism products through widespread use of the European label following a campaign aimed at national and local officials; by providing support for the marketing of rural tourism products at Community level through their integration into the promotion and sales systems for tourism products; lastly, by supporting the creation, by the industry itself, of a European network for the distribution of rural tourism products.

I. INTRODUCTION

I.1. Importance of tourism in the European economy

In all the Member States' economies, tourism (all categories included) is a key industry with one of the fastest growth rates. It accounts for around 5.5% of Community GDP, 8% of private expenditure and 4% of total external trade. It employs nearly 7.5 million people and provides 6% of total employment in the Community; it is a major - and, in some regions, growing - source of new jobs.

There are large disparities between Community regions and between Member States: the importance of tourism in the economy is above the Community average in a group of five countries headed by Spain and Portugal, whose tourist industries account for over 8% of each country's GDP.

Europe is the main destination for tourists worldwide, including Europeans themselves.

The Member States fall into two contrasting groups as far as tourism is concerned: in the first group, which comprises in particular the southern European countries and Ireland, the balance on tourism is positive and expenditure by nationals is below-average; in the second group, which includes the Federal Republic of Germany and the northern European countries, the inhabitants generate the highest expenditure and the balance on tourism is negative. France and Italy are in an intermediate position, being both recipients and exporters of tourism expenditure.

Another disparity has to do with the different forms of tourism, and not just the frequency: in some cases, urban tourism predominates while, in others, tourism involves stays at the seaside, in mountain areas or in the countryside.

Depending on the country, the region, the time of year and the changing tastes of European consumers, tourism will take one or other of the above forms. It will develop more or less quickly, and expenditure will increase to a greater or lesser extent. Over the last fifteen years, expenditure on tourism has increased sixfold.

I.2 Potential trends favourable to rural tourism

The entire European tourist industry is currently having to cope with relatively sluggish demand. Overall growth in the sector in Europe is 5% a year, below the worldwide growth rate (7% a year), with the result that European tourism has lost nearly 10% of its market share over the last decade. In 1980, three out of four holidays were spent in Europe, compared with two out of three in 1988.

This trend can be attributed to two apparently conflicting factors:

- . the relative saturation of certain tourist areas, particularly those with longer tourist traditions;¹
- . growth in the demand for tourism due to steadily rising living standards both inside and outside Europe and to the increase in the number and duration of holidays.

These two factors, viz. the relative saturation of certain tourist areas and greater access to leisure, are reflected in changes in the pattern of tourist demand. Although people in Europe have more and more time in which to take holidays, the average time spent on holiday is shorter, a sign that holidays are being increasingly split up; such fragmentation is leading to greater diversity in the way in which holidays are spent and in particular to the emergence of demand for leisure given over to sporting or countryside activities or quite simply to relaxation. The interest in active leisure, brought into fashion and encouraged by press and health awareness campaigns, has made its mark on the lifestyle of most Europeans and non-Europeans.

Resolution adopted by the European Parliament on 13 July 1990 on the measures needed to protect the environment from potential damage caused by mass tourism, as part of European Year of Tourism (Doc. A3 120/90).

Tourism businesses in rural areas thus have opportunities open to them. Their ability to take advantage of those opportunities will be crucial to the future of tourism in Europe and of all Member States' economies.

They are, however, faced with the challenge of satisfying a more demanding customer who is capable of expressing his needs and can afford to pick and choose. The Community can help such businesses take up the challenge.

Provided that certain geographical criteria are met, most of the investment required for the provision of tourist facilities qualifies for community assistance. Nevertheless, although amenities for tourists in a rural environment are necessary, they will not on their own be sufficient to accommodate on a lasting and expanding basis the demand for an integrated range of tourist products.

A number of studies have demonstrated the need for action at Community level in order to develop the notion of rural tourism, clarify the concept of agri-tourism, codify tourist products, introduce a harmonized system of European symbols and facilitate the organization of those involved in rural tourism at European level. They have stressed that the concept of rural tourism products needs to be broadened to include more than just agri-tourism, if Europe is to offer a full range of products. Moreover, because the people and businesses involved in rural tourism are often isolated, defining rural tourism products will not be enough to ensure that consumers are aware of and attracted to what is on offer; rural tourism businesses and trade associations have therefore requested Community support for European initiatives to promote and market rural tourism.

These conclusions are in keeping with discussions on the role of tourism in rural development conducted within other European or international forums, in particular the European Parliament (resolution of 22 January 1988 on facilitation, promotion and funding of tourism in the European Community), the Council of Europe (symposium held in December 1989 and on the role of rural tourism in European society), the Economic and Social Committee (opinion adopted on 19 July 1990 on tourism and regional development) and the OECD (decision taken by the OECD Council on 13 July 1990 to set up a working group on rural development).

II. COMMUNITY MEASURES FOR WHICH RURAL TOURISM BUSINESSES QUALIFY

Since they are located in mainly agricultural areas or regions whose development is lagging behind, rural tourism businesses qualify for various types of Community assistance.

II.1 Common agricultural policy

Council Regulation (EEC) No 797/85 on improving the efficiency of agricultural structures, as amended by Regulation (EEC) No 3808/89, provides for a system of aid which extends to investment in tourist and craft activities on farms. The scheme may be applied to farmers who derive at least 50% of their total income from activities carried out on the holding, provided that the proportion of income deriving directly from farming is not less than 25% of the farmer's total income and that off-farm activities do not account for more than half the farmer's working time.

Agri-tourism measures limited to specific areas may also be taken under Council Regulation (EEC) No 1820/80 for the stimulation of agricultural development in the less-favoured areas of the west of Ireland or under Council Regulations (EEC) Nos 1401 and 1402/86 introducing a common action for the encouragement of agriculture in certain less-favoured areas of Italy and certain Scottish islands.

Lastly, in its July 1988 communication on the future of rural society,² the Commission gauges the challenge facing rural tourism as part of the development of rural areas having to contend with changes in agriculture, which is their main activity.

II.2 Community regional policy

In view of the major contribution tourism can make towards creating jobs and diversifying economic activities in the regions, the Community's regional policy instruments have, since their inception, been made available for projects aimed at developing tourism.

2 COM(88) 501 final, transmitted to the Council and the European Parliament on 29 July 1988.

Between 1986 and 1988, around 5% of European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) resources was allocated to projects or programmes for developing tourism. Given the geographical eligibility criteria, a proportion of those resources can be deemed to have benefited rural tourism activities.

An even greater effort has been made under certain initiatives, such as the integrated Mediterranean programmes (IMPs), in which projects with agri-tourism objectives are supported (e.g. in Liguria and Apulia).

Following the reform of the structural Funds,³ the Community support frameworks for Objective 1 (regions whose development is lagging behind) include the promotion of tourism (5.5%, or ECU 1.6 billion) among non-agricultural measures. The figure is 7% (ECU 263 million) for Objective 2 (conversion of regions seriously affected by industrial decline). Most of the Community support frameworks for Objective 5(b) (rural development) provide for the possibility of measures to promote rural tourism and vocational training in the field of tourism, including the financing of investment in tourist facilities, such as farm accommodation and the development of natural parks or sports complexes (golf, skiing, etc).

II.3 Community initiatives

On 25 July the Commission adopted a Community initiative for rural development (LEADER - Links between actions for the development of the rural economy),⁴ under which the Community will encourage integrated rural development at local level. A network of around a hundred local rural development action groups will be given the task of managing global grants for financing the following measures: organization of rural development and information on all Community measures and finance likely to encourage rural development in the area covered by the group; vocational training and assistance for employment; rural tourism; small firms, craft enterprises and local services; and exploitation and marketing of local agriculture products.

3 For the list of areas that qualify for assistance under Objective 1, see OJ No L 185 of 15 July 1988 and, for the list of those eligible under Objective 5(b), see OJ No L 198 of 12 July 1989.

4 SEC(90) 1602 final.

The LEADER initiative, which will involve considerable use of new information and communications technology, has been allocated a budget of ECU 400 million by the Commission and covers all regions eligible under Objectives 1 and 5(b).

III. MEASURES TAKEN IN THE CONTEXT OF EUROPEAN TOURISM YEAR TO ASSIST RURAL TOURISM BUSINESSES

The above description of existing Community measures shows that rural tourism can benefit indirectly from them since, as an economic activity, it can, like other industries, contribute to the diversification of a region and boost employment there. In addition, the structural Funds approach (ERDF, EAGGF) is necessarily limited to certain eligible regions.

So that this territorial approach does not lead to the development of uncoordinated tourist activities in a rural environment, assistance from the structural Funds for tourist investment projects needs to be supplemented by a specific horizontal measure to promote rural tourism businesses in the Community.

The location of such businesses in rural areas is an asset, as can be seen from the demand trends referred to above. On the other hand, it is not enough to satisfy complex demand from tourists who are looking for integrated, diversified services.

The need for specific measures to foster rural tourism has already been stressed⁵ and was reiterated at the informal Council meeting of ministers responsible for tourism held at Ashford Castle on 10 March to discuss a programme for European tourism in the nineties.

5 Resolution of the European Parliament on facilitation, promotion and funding of tourism in the European Community, OJ No C 49 of 22 February 1988.

Two studies conducted in 1987 and 1988 analysed the supply of rural tourism in the twelve Member States, identified the main characteristics of this type of tourism⁶ and examined the interactions between the rural heritage and tourism in the Community.⁷ Those studies also recommended that a number of measures be taken as a matter of priority: the notion of rural tourism products to be developed; the concept of agri-tourism to be clarified; tourist products to be codified; the major components (categories of accommodation) to be popularized; tourist road signs to be harmonized; centres of tourist attraction to be promoted; and the organization and coordination of those involved in rural tourism to be facilitated at European level.

European Tourism Year (1990) represents the follow-up to action already taken and is serving as a testing-ground for new initiatives. Rural tourism is fully consistent with the aims of European Tourism Year⁸ and a number of national and pan-European projects on rural tourism are being implemented.

As part of European Tourism Year, the Commission has strengthened its links with a large number of national and European rural tourism organizations. Working sessions and meetings have already identified a set of measures which, having been initiated by the latter, could be brought to fruition thanks to Community support, particularly in the field of standardized symbols and cooperation between operators at European level.

IV. MEASURES TO BE TAKEN BY THE COMMUNITY TO ASSIST RURAL TOURISM BUSINESSES

Given the importance of rural tourism for the tourist industry generally in Europe and its role in pursuing economic and social objectives relating to the development of rural areas, there is a need for consistent action on the part of the Community.

Provided that certain geographical criteria are met, most of the investment required for the provision of tourist facilities qualifies for assistance under the Community's common agricultural policy or regional policy.

6 "Le Tourisme rural dans les 12 Etats membres de la Communauté Economique Européenne", December 1987, Henri Grolleau.

7 "Patrimoine rural et tourisme dans la CEE", December 1988, Henri Grolleau.

8 Council Decision 89/46/EEC of 21 December 1988, OJ No L 17 of 21 January 1989, p. 53.

The studies referred to above and the deliberations of experts⁹ have made it clear, however, that amenities for tourists in a rural environment are necessary but will not on their own be sufficient to accommodate on a lasting and expanding basis the demand for an integrated range of tourist products.

The partnership that has been established between the community and the trade associations concerned has made it possible to pinpoint a number of priority measures to promote rural tourism for which Community support is required.

Additional Community measures, which will be implemented in conjunction with operators in the industry, must, therefore, be aimed at creating rural tourism products which can be marketed in such a way as to encourage the setting-up and development of businesses responsible for managing them.

IV.1 Helping to define rural tourism products

There is no precise definition in Europe of rural tourism or even of rural environment, the forms and interpretations of which vary considerably from country to country. It is not a standard product. The symbols in use are inadequate, and in many cases all that is on offer is accommodation. Moreover, rural tourism is not clearly defined in relation to other tourist products and is very often labelled as "cheap tourism".

The concept of rural tourism products must therefore be broadened to include more than just agri-tourism (or farm-based tourism), to which it is often likened. Agri-tourism itself needs to be clearly defined.

Rural tourism, which is too often limited to providing accommodation, must, if it is to find its niche as a genuine tourist product, offer a "rural tourism package", i.e. it must make available a range of amenities, including socio-cultural and sports facilities. Such amenities will be developed with due regard to the need to safeguard the environment.

9 OECD Conference on the role of local employment initiatives in strengthening the economy of less-populated areas, 11-13 June 1986, Kuopio (Finland); OECD Conference on entrepreneurship and job creation in rural development, 16-18 January 1990, Paris; Working paper on tourism and rural development policy for the 58th meeting of the OECD Tourism Committee, 25-27 April 1990, Paris.

This concept implies the co-existence in a particular area of (i) rural tourism centres equipped with the basic infrastructure (swimming pools, tennis courts, etc.), and providing cultural facilities and theme-based holidaying opportunities (sports, the arts, discovering the countryside, etc.) and (ii) less concentrated forms of rural tourism focusing on individual investment (in particular farm-based tourism).

In order to help define rural tourism products, the Community must take action on two fronts:

IV.1.1 Need for more detailed information on the demand for rural tourism products

A survey will be conducted with a view to pinpointing the characteristics and trends of the rural leisure market at Community level.

The findings, which will be widely disseminated, will be used by operators in devising specific new rural tourism products, along the lines of theme-based tours (visiting vineyards, abbeys, etc.), transfrontier cultural and rural itineraries, health tourism, integrating the environment into rural tourism products, etc.;

IV.1.2 Need for improved transparency of the supply of rural tourism products

Among other things, the purpose of defining a rural tourism product is to improve access to that product. Supply is too often uneven, and it is important that Europe should be in a position to supply quality products.

There is a case for examining with operators whether the creation of a European rural tourism logo is necessary and feasible and, if so, helping operators to design and promote the use of such a logo as a quality label for those products.

The logo should serve two purposes:

- (i) Harmonization of tourist accommodation in rural areas, taking each category in turn: hotels, camp sites, furnished accommodation, guest rooms, farm-based tourism and holiday villages

Such harmonization must in no case run counter to the need to preserve the diversity and unique character (essence) of rural tourism in each country.

Its sole purpose is to provide a clear picture, and facilitate the promotion, of what is on offer;

- (ii) Harmonization of information on all the components of rural tourism

The aim here is to provide tourists in Europe with better information on the local facilities available, whether in rural tourist centres or for the less concentrated forms of rural tourism by helping to devise an appropriate system of symbols. This information campaign will thus facilitate cooperation between operators in the field of rural tourism.

With the assistance of a working party consisting of experts from the various Member States, the Commission is preparing the necessary harmonization work (defining the minimum standards for each type of accommodation for tourists, the minimum components of the European label). It will also propose the symbols identifying the various types of accommodation and will select the European label. Lastly, schemes will be devised for encouraging the adoption of, and compliance with, European standards and for verifying their use (monitoring compliance with the standards and guarantees offered to guests).

IV.2 Helping to create and develop rural tourism products

Knowing about the demand for rural tourism must lead to incentives to create and develop rural tourism products in the various regions of the Community.

The following measures may be implemented in all the regions:

- IV.2.1 Measures to provide better information on, and access to, the Community aid schemes in respect of rural tourism and to assist the local authorities in their rural tourism role:

- (i) compendium of official texts of a legal, tax, financial or private nature (bodies of rules, internal regulations of hotel chains, specifications for distribution networks, etc.) on rural tourism for each Member State;

- (ii) publication of specific documents intended for those involved in rural tourism.

Community information structures already exist: nearly one Euro-Info-Centre¹⁰ in three is situated in the heart of a rural area; many of them are to be found in areas which are eligible under Objective 1. Rural development and promotion centres ("carrefours")¹¹ will be set up solely in rural areas. As part of their responsibilities, the local rural development action groups assisted under the LEADER initiative will also be able to provide information on rural tourism in the areas they cover. The measure under consideration is designed, therefore, not with a view to establishing new information structures but with a view to identifying and collating the information required and making it accessible.

Work will be undertaken on devising new types of information material and helping certain Euro-Info-Centres to specialize in rural tourism;

IV.2.2 Measures to encourage cooperation between rural tourism businesses:

- (i) Cooperation between those involved locally (local authorities, firms, associations, etc.) with a view to devising and marketing products which are diversified but which form part of a consistent local strategy. The local rural development action groups supported under the LEADER initiative will be able to perform this task in the areas they cover. Seminars, exchanges of experts and study visits should be organized with a view to encouraging the exchange of experience and the transfer of practices from those areas to other Community regions wishing to introduce rural tourism products;
- (ii) Inter-regional cooperation and the establishment of regional networks sharing common projects linked to regional tourism, e.g. spa-based holidays, Mediterranean networks offering integrated rural tourism packages, networks bringing together Celtic regions;

10 SEC(89)931 final; COM(87)152 final.

11 SEC(89) 1717.

- (iii) Cooperation and contacts between developers of rural tourism products and those who supply the necessary goods and services (specialists in hotel infrastructures, sports facilities and tourism management, on the one hand, and rural tourism businesses, on the other): this "Rural Tourism Exchange", as it were, must be organized at European level, along the lines of the Europartenariat:¹² greater transparency of supply and demand would thus make it easier to acquire the necessary means for creating rural tourism products and for adapting existing tourist facilities to the specific requirements of rural tourism (scale, flexibility, "seasonality", individualized management, etc.);

IV.2.3 Measures to foster more dynamic human resources as a means of improving the management of rural tourism activities

The supply of rural tourism products must be increased qualitatively as well as quantitatively: account must be taken of the more exacting requirements of potential customers in terms of the diversity of tourist products and the standard of service. The quality of facilities and services available calls for a training effort both on the part of those managing rural tourism businesses and their employees and on the part of those representing the local authorities responsible for promoting a particular development project.

Consideration should be given to a number of measures in association with the partners concerned:

- (i) the setting-up of a European network of rural tourism advisers/experts who could carry out a feasibility study coupled with a field test designed to define the content and detailed arrangements of the training required;
- (ii) the implementation of a European exchange programme intended for farmers involved in agri-tourism and instructors/development agents in the field of the rural environment;

12 COM(89)76.

- (iii) on the basis of the results of the experimental training programme for managers of SMEs,¹³ the launch of a pilot scheme focusing on rural tourism;
- (iv) the achievement of synergy in the field of innovation by devising transnational or transfrontier pilot schemes for

continuing vocational training and the establishment of regional consortia to identify the needs as regards qualifications and vocational skills for rural tourism and to provide technical assistance for continuing training: these measures will be carried out in conjunction with the FORCE programme¹⁴ in particular and with other existing Community programmes such as EUTOTECNET, COMETT, LINGUA and PETRA.

IV.3 Promoting access to the market in rural tourism products

Measures relating to the supply of rural tourism products (definition, harmonization, direct start-up grants, provision of services) must be backed up by demand-side measures to foster use of the products that will have been created or improved.

The Community can promote market access through a series of back-up measures implemented by the national and European organizations representing the industry:

IV.3.1 Customer information

- (i) Awareness of the facilities available at national level: A European farmhouse-tourism guide is currently being prepared by COPA-COGECA as part of European Tourism Year. It would seem virtually impossible, given the abundance of products on offer, to publish a general guidebook on rural tourism in Europe. However, a more practical rural tourism manual serving as a "guidebook of guidebooks" and listing all the main rural tourism organizations in the Member States from which tourists could obtain more detailed national guides should be produced. In the same connection, European subject-related guidebooks (horse-riding, cultural tourism) would be a useful addition to the information available;

13 "Preparing small and medium-sized enterprises for Europe 1992 - Experimental training schemes" (SEC(88)1860 final).

14 OJ No L 156 of 21 June 1990, p. 1.

(ii) Identification of supply through the use of standardized European symbols and specific promotional measures:

- national and local officials in order to promote widespread use of the standardized European symbols,
- the general public at large in order to ensure acquaintance with and recognition of the symbols.

IV.3.2 Encouraging improvements in the quality of rural tourism products through widespread use of the European label:

- (i) a campaign to promote the label among national and local officials will be mounted and coordinated with work on devising an "environment" label;
- (ii) as part of the "Village I love" scheme, part-financed by the Commission in the context of European Tourism Year, a competition will be organized to find the best projects bearing the European logo;
- (iii) distribution of the "tourism manifesto for European villages and countryside" which is currently being prepared and which is intended to serve as a code of conduct and know-how in the field of rural tourism.

IV.3.3 Marketing at European level of rural tourism products

The aim is to promote integration of rural tourism products into the promotional and sales systems which exist for tourist products (tourist offices, tour operators, travel agencies, etc.) by providing support for a number of measures including:

- (i) an analysis of the existing marketing networks in Member States (commercial operators, associations, etc.);
- (ii) cooperation between suppliers and promoters/sellers of rural tourism products through:
 - establishment of a European rural tourism section at tourism fairs in order to increase awareness of what rural tourism has to offer and to promote use of the European label;

- pilot schemes for establishing cooperation between promoters/sellers (tour operators, travel agencies) and suppliers of rural tourism products;

(iii) creation of a European network for the distribution of rural tourism products:

- assistance with the setting-up of a European computerized data bank managed by the industry itself and covering the full range of products available;
- assistance in bringing into service one or more computerized central reservation systems managed by the industry itself and enabling a large number of rural tourism products to be marketed at European level.

V. WORK PROGRAMME, TIMETABLE AND BUDGET

In accordance with the guidelines described above, the Commission will carry out, in association with the partners concerned, a Community action programme to assist rural tourism businesses in Europe, as described in the Annex.

The estimate of needs up to 1994 is ECU 5.8 million, which will be covered by budget heading B2-710 (Measures in the field of tourism).

Assistance for rural tourism is also available under the Community rural development initiative (LEADER) and the FORCE programme.

Rural tourism promotion measures could also qualify for assistance under Article 10 of the ERDF Regulation (support for interregional cooperation, pooling of experience and development cooperation between different Community regions).

ANNEX

ACTION PROGRAMME

With a view to achieving the aims laid down, the following measures will be implemented in association with the partners concerned:

I. Defining rural tourism products and devising a harmonized system of symbols

Action will be taken:

I.1 To improve information on the demand for rural tourism products

For it to be viewed as a product in its own right, rural tourism, which must be wider in concept than agri-tourism, must offer a tourism package, i.e. a combination of services including socio-cultural and sporting activities.

A survey will be carried out to ascertain customer characteristics and trends. The results will serve as a guide for devising new products which are specific to rural tourism and adapted to tourist requirements and which reflect the potential of rural areas.

The survey will also comprise an analysis of the environmental impact of the expected developments.

I.2 To improve the transparency of the supply of rural tourism products

There is a case for examining with operators whether it would be feasible to introduce a European rural tourism logo and, if so, helping operators to design and promote the use of such a logo as a quality label. A prior study of ways and means of harmonizing tourist accommodation in rural areas by category (hotel, campsite, furnished accommodation, guest-room, farm accommodation, holiday village) and harmonizing information on all components of rural tourism products will be conducted in order to facilitate the introduction, if need be, of an appropriate system of symbols.

A working party of experts from the Member States, under the authority of the Commission, will be instructed to carry out the necessary harmonization work (definition of minimum standards for each type of tourist accommodation, minimum requirements for the European label). It will also put forward proposals on how to encourage the adoption of, and compliance with, the European standards, and on how to monitor them.

II. Creation and improvement of rural tourism products

Action will be taken:

II.1 To improve information on, and access to, Community assistance available for promoting rural tourism and to facilitate the tourist activities of local authorities in rural areas, in particular through: assistance for compiling official documents on legal, tax and financial matters in each Member State; publication of documents to assist operators; measures to foster awareness and utilization of existing information centres (Euro-Info-Centres, "carrefours", local rural development action groups supported under the LEADER initiative); designing of information material and dedication of certain Euro-Info-Centres to rural tourism;

II.2 To promote cooperation between rural tourism businesses through: exchange of experience and transfer of practices by organizing visits, seminars and exchanges of experts; promotion of cooperation between developers of rural tourism products and suppliers of goods and services, in particular support for trade fairs on cooperation; measures to foster inter-regional cooperation and to set up networks of regions with common projects linked to rural tourism, and measures to streamline the management of rural tourism activities, so as to improve the situation as regards human resources, in particular by setting up a network of experts/advisers to determine training needs; establishment of a European exchange programme for farmers and instructors; organization of a pilot scheme for training managers and transnational pilot schemes for continuing vocational training, and the development of regional consortia.

The environmental dimension will be fully incorporated into rural tourism products.

III. Promotion and marketing of rural tourism products

Action will be taken:

- III.1 To improve customer information and promote quality improvements, in particular through: support for the compilation of guidebooks and other publications (European guidebook on farm tourism; manual of rural-tourism guidebooks; theme-based guidebooks); dissemination of the European label and logo through publicity and promotional measures (media), in coordination with work on devising an "environment" label; competition to find the best European rural tourist areas; promotion of a system of European symbols among national authorities and the general public;
- III.2 To promote the marketing of rural tourism products through: the inclusion of a rural tourism section in tourism and agricultural fairs; pilot schemes for cooperation between suppliers and developers of such products (tour operators, travel agencies, intermediaries), and the establishment of a European distribution network in the light of a survey of existing marketing channels in the Member States (trade or association-related) and a feasibility study on such a network; and, at the same time, assistance for the setting-up of one or more computerized reservation systems managed by the industry itself to market rural tourism products throughout the Community.

COMPETITIVENESS AND EMPLOYMENT IMPACT STATEMENT

I. What is the main reason for introducing the measure?

To assist rural tourism businesses in Europe.

II. Features of the businesses in question. In particular:

(a) Are there many SMEs? Yes

(b) Are they concentrated in regions which are:

(i) eligible for regional aid in the Member States?

Yes

(ii) eligible under the ERDF? Yes

III. What direct obligations does this measure impose on businesses?

None

IV. What indirect obligations are local authorities likely to impose on businesses?

None

V. Are there any special measures in respect of SMEs? Please specify.

No

VI. What is the likely effect on:

(a) the competitiveness of businesses?
an improvement, due to the development of the rural tourism market

(b) employment?
an increase

VII. Have both sides of industry been consulted? Please indicate their opinions

No

FINANCIAL RECORD

1. Budget heading concerned:

B2-710: Measures in the field of tourism

2. Appropriations entered under this heading:

1991 (preliminary draft budget)

CA	PA
5 100 000	5 100 000

3. Expenditure deriving from the decisions laid before the Commission (indicative figures; depending on budget funds available):

1991	1992	1993	1994
CA	CA	CA	CA
1 600 000	1 900 000	1 600 000	700 000

4. Other financial repercussions: Additional amounts available under the FORCE programme and possibly the ERDF (Article 10).