

COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

COM(88) 338 final.

Brussels, 8 June 1988

ENVIRONMENT AND AGRICULTURE

(Commission Communication)

ENVIRONMENT AND AGRICULTURE

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Agricultural evolution and PAC reform

European Agriculture is traditionally an ally of the environment. Over the centuries European farmers have shaped, maintained and protected the vast majority of the land surface of the continent. Since they have depended upon nature for their livelihood, farmers have, on the whole, lived and worked in harmony with nature. They have depended upon fertile soils, clean waters and a stable ecological balance. They have therefore played a key role in maintaining the soil, preventing rural pollution and defending rural ecology.

To a major extent this remains true. It is still farmers who protect much of Europe's land area from exhaustion, pollution or erosion. In zones where depopulation and abandonment of the land threatens damaging ecological consequences, it is often farming activity which holds these consequences at bay. But the picture has begun to change.

In the past 40 years agriculture has, on the one hand, undergone a technological revolution which has led to more intensive farming practices, and on the other, it has itself suffered from pressures coming from other economic activities, such as urbanisation, industrial development and transport.

The recent review of the CAP, confronted by problems of over-production, has however led the Community to reflect on the role of agriculture in the economy and in society. Objectives, such as self-sufficiency in foodstuffs or socio-economic ones such as maintenance of farmers' incomes have been complemented by objectives relating to the protection of certain traditional values which agriculture represents in our society, in particular with respect to the protection of the environment. It follows that the measures which now need to be taken to ensure a better control of production must be such so as to guarantee that all future progress in the sector is achieved in harmony with environmental requirements, and that an environmental equilibrium is eventually re-established in the zones affected from this point of view.

It is within this framework that the Community has been working on its agricultural structural policy, in order to establish the measures which must accompany the reform of market organisation. The successive modifications of R. 797/85 ⁽¹⁾ on improving the efficiency of agricultural structures, indicate a will to promote a number of actions, concentrating on the double objective of avoiding first the problems caused by intensive agriculture, and second any negative environmental consequences.

⁽¹⁾ OJ No L 93, 30.3.85, p. 1

Moreover, the agreement by Heads of State and of Government of February 1988 concerning the reform of the CAP, has reinforced the means of reaching these goals.

So it is that there exists today a context more favourable to the integration of an environmental dimension in the framework of the adaptation of production potential to market requirements.

2. The Commission's reflections on environment and agriculture

2.1. The Green Paper

The Commission has on a number of occasions underlined the need for agricultural policy to take the environment into account. The Green Paper of July 1985 noted that "The role of agriculture in a modern industrialised economy is increasingly perceived to include not only strategic, economic and social functions, but also the conservation of the rural environment. At a time when the Community is self-sufficient in many agricultural products, and therefore obliged to manage its productive capacity in a prudent way, environmental considerations even gain in importance". The Commission further noted that: "In the last decades agriculture has undergone a technological revolution which has profoundly changed farming practices. There is growing concern about the effects of such changes on the environment, which is expressed not only among the urban population but also among those engaged in agriculture" and "although environmental considerations have already been taken into account in the CAP in recent years It is necessary to consider what ... measures could be envisaged in the next decade"; the Green Paper accepted that "agriculture has to be considered as a sector of economic activity which, like other sectors with potentially harmful activities, should be subject to reasonable public prescriptions and controls designed to avoid the deterioration of the environment" as well as that "in general the principle of "Polluter Pays" would apply and it would not be normal for farmers to expect to be compensated by the public authorities for the introduction of such rules". Furthermore, it was underlined that "at least as important as the passive protection of the environment is a policy designed to protect farming practices, which conserve the rural environment, and to protect specific sites".

2.2. Programme of action on the environment

In its fourth programme of action on the environment (1987-1992), the Commission specially stressed the need to integrate the environmental dimension into other Community policies, including the agricultural policy.

With this in mind, the Commission considered it necessary to establish a proper balance between agricultural development and the sometimes conflicting needs of environmental conservation. It has thus announced proposals aimed at reducing the damage caused by agriculture to the ecological infrastructure. These proposals refer in particular to pollution resulting from intensive animal breeding and to the excessive use of fertilizers and pesticides, as well as to the protection of natural habitats.

3. Reflections of the European Parliament

In its resolution of 19.2.1986, the European Parliament stressed that "the reform of the CAP gives an opportunity to establish a coherent agricultural policy, which also seeks to preserve the environment and the way of life in rural areas", and that "ways must be found to meet the economic and social needs of the farming community, bearing environmental considerations in mind". Moreover, the Parliament, moreover, asked for "an overall policy based on quantitative and qualitative objectives, aiming particularly at :

- rational land use and long term land conservation, combined with protection of natural riches and resources as a whole
- the maintenance and development of rural life
- the production of good-quality food
- closer cooperation between agriculture and industry
- changing the general conditions of agricultural policy in such a way as to foster an agriculture compatible with the environment".

The European Parliament insisted, in particular, on the necessity for a European Soils Policy (planning, fight against soil erosion, reforestation, diversification of agricultural production, the environmental assessment of large agricultural projects, respect of the Community directives and international conventions on the protection of wild fauna), and on an integrated rural planning policy based on collaboration between all parties concerned. It also considers that the structural agricultural policy initiated by R-797/85 should be continued, through budgetary improvement and a better distribution of funds in favour of the "orientation" sector of EAGGF, the channelling of structural funds into regional programmes which foresee the remuneration of certain agricultural practices compatible with the environment, and, most important, the preparation of precise rules governing the granting of structural funds in favour of ecological agricultural practices.

4. The approach to the problem by the Ministers of Agriculture and of the Environment

The Ministers of Agriculture and of the Environment have also stressed the importance of taking into account the environmental constraints, and have accepted the Commission's position that additional measures are necessary.

Their conclusions were drawn at the two informal meetings held on 8.9.1987 at Nyborg (Denmark) for the Ministers of Agriculture, and on 26.2.88 at Wilbad-Kreuth (Germany) for the Ministers of the Environment.

The debate has allowed us to note that though there is some convergence between the objective of better production control on the one hand, and an environmental policy on the other, the Ministers of Agriculture express different preoccupations resulting from the diversity of conditions in the regions of the Community. Two major preoccupations can be noted on this subject : the problems that intensive agriculture pose for the environment, and rural desertification which is equally destructive from an environmental point of view.

The Agriculture Ministers recognised the need for better Community co-ordination in the search for an environmental equilibrium in agriculture, but were more cautious about the need for common rules at a European level, given the need to find ad-hoc solutions adapted to the specific diversities of the zones concerned.

The Environment Ministers, too, noted that caution was required in tackling a problem as complex and delicate as the development of agriculture in harmony with the environment.

They stressed the need for a policy which would not only prevent but also correct the excesses of intensive agriculture in certain zones, so as to protect the environment from which the farmers themselves draw their subsistence, without, however, reducing their standard of living. Such a policy could, in particular, be based on the agricultural structural policy, "set-aside", extensification and early retirement schemes, which should be used to the full in order to help achieve the objectives of the environmental protection.

The Environment Ministers concluded that the "environmental" dimension should be progressively integrated into agriculture, and that the flexibility necessary to allow for different conditions in the Member States should not prevent the establishment as well as the respect of common principles. Compensation and economic incentives, together with regulatory measures, should support the effort of farmers to protect the environment, whilst appropriate assistance should be provided in the field of training, information and its dissemination.

5. The approach of international organisations

Similar discussions are under way in all Member States as well as in a number of international organisations.

For instance, OECD has set up an ad hoc working group on the environment and agriculture, which has produced a very detailed and comprehensive report.

Important work has also been undertaken by the Council of Europe and by the United Nations. The recent Bruntland Report is an example, which gives particular thought to environmental problems in agriculture.

6. The aim of this paper

This paper aims to clarify the Commission's guidelines on this subject and is based on the positions expressed by the European Parliament and by the Ministers of Agriculture and of the Environment; it uses the extensive body of work that has already been done within the Community as well as the international organisations with respect to agriculture and environment.

It deals in particular with the consequences of recent developments in agriculture on the environment, with a view to focusing on the problems and to establishing common principles or guidelines, accompanied by priorities for action as well as identifying a first phase of proposals to the Council.

A workable environmental and agricultural policy for the rural areas of Europe must take fully into account the wide diversity of European agriculture, the very different environmental problems that it poses for the environment and its social and economic situation.

The Commission will examine to the extent possible the costs and benefits of actions which might be taken, and will take into account social, economic and environmental aspects, as well as the most recent scientific data.

The "polluter pays" principle must of course apply to agricultural activity as it does elsewhere, but this must be done in conjunction with the other policies tailored to meet the particular needs of the rural population.

II SPECIFIC PROBLEMS

The changes which have characterized agriculture in recent decades - mechanisation, use of agrochemicals, the improvement of cultivation techniques and the intensification of much agricultural production have led to higher yields but have also led to the creation of structural surpluses, and very often to environmental damage.

In particular the following specific problems have been indentified :

- Deterioration of certain terrestrial habitats and extinction of wildlife species due to habit disturbance, pollution and drainage of wetlands. Although other developments (tourism, urbanisation, industrial pollution) have also contributed to the problem, it appears that intensive agricultural practices are the cause of both fauna and flora extinction, in many regions of the Community.
- Water quality problems in many areas of intensive agriculture. These include eutrophication, nitrate and pesticide pollution mainly as a result of misuse and/or overuse of chemicals, animal manures and other organic material. In many regions of the Community there is a problem concerning nitrate in drinking water which often exceeds the Commission's guideline of 25 mg/l, or even the maximum limit of 50 mg/l, and which is in general on the increase.
- The same situation exists for pesticides for which the maximum admissible concentration is 0,1 µg/l and 0,5 µg when all products are considered (Directive 80/778/CEE ⁽¹⁾).

⁽¹⁾ OJ No L 229, 30.8.1980, p. 11

Moreover there is growing concern for the future about the following :

- Soil degradation and in particular soil erosion can result not only from intensive farming but also from the abandonment of agricultural activity in the less favoured, hilly or mountainous areas. The total threatened area in the Community is estimated at at least 25 million hectares, that is about eight times the size of the Netherlands. Erosion is a particularly grave problem in the Mediterranean countries where losses of top soil reach up to 2800 kg/ha/year, but Northern countries do not escape the problem.
- Increased ammonia evaporation as a result of intensive livestock rearing and use of certain types of fertilizers is leading to the deterioration of air quality. Approximately half of the total nitrogen in manure is in the form of ammonia. Where manure is applied to the soil surface most of this ammonia can be lost to the atmosphere within a few days if conditions are suitable.
- The long term accumulation of heavy metals and acidification makes soils unsuitable for farming, while pollution of waters makes irrigation difficult and residues of chemical substances may lower the quality of agricultural products.
- Landscape changes due to undesirable deforestation or afforestation, field rationalisation, hedgerow removal, wetlands drainage and the deterioration of other features are destroying flora and fauna habitat.

It is also worthy of note that modern agricultural techniques can affect the taste quality of foodstuffs.

III. CURRENT COMMUNITY MEASURES

1. The Community has already adopted agricultural measures directly or indirectly aimed at promoting environmental objectives and reducing the impact of modern farming on the environment.

Those include:

- the introduction of a system of Community aids to farmers who undertake to follow practices compatible with the environment in sensitive zones
- a system of aids to encourage farm investments for the protection or improvement of the environment, within the farm holding or beyond (agro-food industry)
- adoption of a series of provisions limiting or prohibiting the payment of investment aids for intensive livestock production
- the application of a Community system of compensatory allowances to help maintain farming activity in mountainous and less favoured areas where the abandonment of agriculture could be detrimental to the environment
- the prohibition of the use of a number of harmful pesticides
- measures for the protection of the Community's forests against atmospheric pollution and fires
- the introduction of a system of additional Community aids to help train farmers, in view of the qualitative re-orientation of production and the application of production practices compatible with environmental requirements
- the introduction of a set of measures aimed at encouraging the extensification of production and the set aside as well as the cessation of farming through an early retirement scheme.

Amongst the above mentioned measures, the encouragement of agricultural practices compatible with environmental requirements, the extensification of the production and "set-aside" will play a key role in the development of the land use system in agriculture and have beneficial effects on the environment.

Moreover it has to be noted that, in the context of national aids, it was accepted that they may be granted within the framework of a more flexible system for investment aimed at the protection and improvement of the environment, subject to its not leading to distortions in competition (Article 92-94 of Treaty of Rome).

2. Within the framework of Article 19 of R. 797/85 on improving the efficiency of agricultural structures, the Commission has received its first applications for financial contributions by the Community for the introduction of measures for the protection of the environment in certain rural areas.

Only two countries, Germany and United Kingdom, have presented such applications to date, and the Commission hopes that Member States make wider use of the possibilities offered by the measure.

3. With respect to the application of certain measures having an impact on the environment, the Commission, following a demand by the Informal Council of Agricultural Ministers at Nyborg, has prepared an inventory of regulatory and administrative procedures introduced by the Member States for the adaptation of intensive agriculture.

This inventory was transmitted to Member States which were invited to give supplementary information and precisions where necessary.

IV. MEASURES ENVISAGED

1. Land Use

Land use in the Community is not static : it is multi-functional and therefore does not depend exclusively on agriculture, although agriculture plays a dominant role.

The man/land relationship, the economic situation, urban and industrial development, habitat requirements for fauna and flora, are some of the factors which need to be incorporated into any review of the problem.

From a purely agricultural point of view, land use is subject to short and long term changes.

In the short term, adjustments are made in cropping as part of rotational systems or in response to management, economic or climatic factors. In the longer term, changing market conditions and technological development lead to more general adjustments, while the total area of agricultural land alters as land is reclaimed, abandoned or lost to non-agricultural uses. Even within agricultural uses there are significant changes such as the reduction of grasslands or the expansion of oilseed crops and green fodder observed in past years.

The environmental implications of land use, especially in the agricultural context, suggest that planning and incentives aimed at orienting production and at limiting environmentally undesirable developments are increasingly necessary.

As concluded by the Ministers for the Environment, the structural funds constitute a privileged instrument in achieving such aims, as well as for the integration of the environmental dimension in the agricultural sector.

Community action in this field should be based on the existing Environment Impact Assessment Directive ⁽¹⁾. This contains annexes listing project types for which assessment is mandatory or is optional. The Commission will propose the modification of this Directive making it mandatory to carry out environmental impact assessments where decisions are required concerning large-scale agricultural projects, such as the restructuring of holdings, changes in the water regime, roads, etc. Such assessment will be particularly important in the case of public funding. Criteria or size thresholds should be envisaged for this purpose.

In addition, the possibility of discouraging certain types of large scale land use change would be examined. The Commission will, in particular, undertake an early review of large scale agricultural arterial drainage projects with a view to limiting or even in some case or regions, prohibiting the use of public aids for this purpose.

Furthermore and in line with the Green Paper, the Commission will examine additional measures to introduce or maintain agricultural practices compatible with the need for the protection of nature.

In many cases they could be introduced on a voluntary basis, for example in the form of management contracts between public authorities and the public concerned.

In some zones, where the environmental balance is particularly threatened, certain compulsory measures should not be excluded. In this context, the establishment of ecological corridors could be envisaged, not only for the habitat protection, but also along water courses or close to ponds, for the protection of water as a natural resource.

Currently, Article 19 of R-797/85 offers the possibility of initiatives by farmers for the protection of the environment on a voluntary basis.

⁽¹⁾ Directive 85/337, OJ No L 175, 5.7.85, p. 40

The Commission is examining the opportunity of making these measures applicable in those cases where farmers are obliged to introduce cropping or breeding practices compatible with the environmental requirements. It can be noted on this subject that the conditions imposed recently by the Commission in its detailed rules for applying the set aside, such as limitations in the use of fertilizers, animal manure and plant protection products or the obligation for the farmers to maintain the soil in good condition, could result in a positive contribution to the environment, if correctly applied.

The same is true of extensification measures, the procedures for which need still to be defined. However, their introduction presupposes a thorough examination of possible obstacles which may exist in legislation concerning taxes on land. In addition, the measures still on the table of the Council concerning direct income aids should favour the survival of small agricultural holdings of the family type, the role of which is important for the rural environment and the overall agricultural economy.

Finally, the establishment of the set-aside and extensification schemes offer great possibilities for the protection of agricultural ecosystems. Land made available as a result of these programmes could be used for non-agricultural purposes in the framework of integrated countryside management programmes, in order to favour initiatives which could ensure a complementary income for farmers as well as environmental benefits.

The main possibilities in this field are agri-tourism in all its forms (hunting, fishing, riding...) and the extensive rearing of game or sporting breeds.

2. Use of Pesticides

The use of pesticides in agriculture, although necessary, can cause environmental problems which have been recognised for many years. The principal problems are :

- the effects of residues in food and water on human health and the risks associated with spray drift from pesticides during application
- the unintended negative effects of pesticides on species, other than those to which they are applied.
- the risk for the farmers themselves resulting from inappropriate use of pesticides.

The general objective of Community policy must be to reduce to a strict minimum, the use of chemicals for agriculture, not only because of the known hazards to humans, fauna and flora, but also because of uncertainty about the long-term and synergetic effects of the release of such agents into the environment.

The Commission has, therefore, the intention to proceed with the revision of existing legislation on pesticides ⁽¹⁾.

To achieve this, it will make use of the most recent scientific findings and will make the appropriate proposals.

Much more attention must be given to the broader effects of pesticides on the environment as a whole and to wildlife in particular.

In that context, Community action could concern the authorisation of substances and products as well as of their distribution and application.

As already announced at the Informal Council of Ministers of Agriculture of 1987, the Commission is now considering a revision of its 1976 proposal on the authorisation of pesticides.

This might include the establishment of a "positive list" of permissible active ingredients, which would be noted on a complete analysis of all relevant properties of these materials. There would also be appropriate review procedures and controls on labelling.

⁽¹⁾ Council Directive 78/631 on classification, packaging and labelling of dangerous chemicals, Council Directive 79/117 prohibiting the placing on the market and use of plant protection products containing certain active substances, Council Directive 76/895 on fixing of maximum levels for pesticide residues in and on fruit and vegetables, Council Directive 86/362 on fixing of maximum levels for pesticide residues in and on cereals and Council Directive 86/363 for pesticide residues in and on foodstuffs of animal origin, Council Directive 87/519 concerning maximum levels for substances and undesirable products in animal feed (pesticides).

In the longer term the Commission will also examine the necessity and the possibility of controls on the distribution and application of pesticides. Both of these, particularly in the case of the more dangerous products, might be limited to persons with the appropriate professional qualifications, equipment and facilities. The most dangerous products might be sold only on prescription and their application might be subject to the terms of that prescription. In certain cases, notably application by aircraft, special authorisations and technical controls might be required. To the greatest extent compatible with a general harmony of practice throughout the Community the various controls and qualifications would be administered at a national level and would be integrated into existing national systems.

Obviously, the cornerstone of all efforts to reduce and rationalise the use of chemicals in agriculture lies in the constant improvement of information and of training of the users themselves, who must be fully aware of their own real interest.

3. Intensive animal and plant production

Traditionally, livestock production is integrated into general farming activity. It uses animal feed produced on the farm, and employs animal wastes to improve the soil. But modern systems of livestock production, exploiting economies of scale and assisted by new techniques of feeding and management as well as by low-priced imported feed stuffs have led to a specialisation, which involves large numbers of animals living on a small area of land, in fact a quasi-industrial activity.

When animal wastes produced exceed the absorption capacity of both the soil and vegetation they create a considerable risk of pollution of surface and ground waters by nitrates, toxic trace elements and pathogenic micro-organisms. Production units also cause problems of smell and noise. Controls should be imposed on this type of activity, just as they are for other activities of an industrial nature.

Similar problems sometimes arise from the excessive use of chemical fertilisers in intensive crop production.

Certain Member States are already taking the first steps to control the effects of intensive agriculture.

The Council approved in 1987 a system of Community aids for extensification of agricultural production and for farmers in environmentally sensitive zones, who undertake to follow practices compatible with the environment.

But additional Community action seems to be necessary to protect the environment on a more general scale, while ensuring fair conditions of competition.

Such action could cover both intensive livestock rearing and intensive crop production, particularly in zones with considerable pollution or risk of pollution of surface and ground waters by nitrates of the Community ("vulnerable zones").

It will first be necessary to define Community parameters and procedures for the identification and designation by Member States of such "vulnerable zones".

The Commission intends to propose that Member States establish programmes with a view to achieving early and appropriate cuts in the quantities of nitrate leaching into the soil and into the water table, allowing for a re-establishment of a normal situation in due course.

Such programmes should allow Member States to take into account the particular characteristics, natural as well as socio-economic, to introduce a flexibility as to the choice of means for reducing nitrate leaching, to provide appropriate technical and/or financial assistance to help farmers adapt to the new agro-economic context, avoiding at the same time unrealistic requirements on administration and control.

In this context the Member States will do their best to ensure that the objectives can be reached through the active and voluntary participation of farmers.

As far as intensive livestock production is concerned the creation of new large units and important extension of all existing ones should be subject to prior authorisation on the basis of an environmental impact assessment specifying particular conditions to be respected.

In the vulnerable zones, the rate of application of animal manures should be within the take up rate by crops.

In situations where there is a surplus of manure, proof must be given that it can be disposed of in an environmentally appropriate way, or the intensity of livestock production should be reduced.

4. Quality of Products

The possibilities offered by organic farming should not be underestimated. In fact, this activity has not only favourable effects on the environment but may also assure a diversification in producers' sources of revenue; it can benefit from the different aid programmes for production and commercialisation, but in order to increase the number of outlets, it requires an appropriate legislative framework that can offer guarantees to the consumer of product authenticity and adequate protection for the producer against unfair competition.

It would also be useful to take more into account the quality element in classification of agricultural products given the fact that the current search for a better visual appearance incites producers to the over-use of chemical inputs.

U. ACCOMPANYING MEASURES

At present, existing Community legislation introducing various systems of Community aids allows for actions to be taken by farmers aiming at the protection of the environment (e.g. aids to farmers who undertake to follow practices compatible with the environment, aids for investments for the protection and improvement of the environment, aids for hill farming and less favoured areas, aids for set-aside and extensification programmes etc...).

In the periodic review of the above mentioned systems of aids, their environmental effects should be assessed and proposals should be made accordingly in order to optimize these effects.

It is, however, important that Member States make fuller use of the existing provisions which allow farmers to protect the environment. The Commission fully encourages and supports such an effort.

In addition, extension services in all Member States should be trained and equipped in a way as to be able to contribute towards a less intensive and less polluting agriculture in accordance with what is done for training the farmers on the basis of Community provisions. In certain cases, studies should be carried out in order to ensure better training and orientation of the services concerned.

The establishment of codes of good agricultural practice would be a helpful tool to be developed. There should be more funds for research in those sectors of low input agriculture, such as integrated pest control or the organic farming, where research is generally less advanced than for conventional high input agriculture.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

1. General guidelines

Agricultural activity has for centuries co-existed in harmony with the environment, but some of the present trends in agriculture are causing environmental concern and problems which should be better controlled.

The reform of CAP provides an excellent opportunity to efficiently integrate the economic, social and environmental elements of this policy.

On the one hand, the rigorous market and price policy, indispensable for economic and financial reasons, will at the same time discourage unjustified intensification, which is harmful to the environment.

On the other hand, the reinforcement of social structural measures and the aid schemes intended to improve and diversify farmers income, will also permit the promotion of beneficial effects on the environment.

A judicious combination of regulatory and incentive measures, which should normally lead to economies rather than expenditure, will lead in the future to an agriculture more friendly to the environment but not necessarily less efficient.

This combination must, of course, be modulated with regard to regional and other diversities of European agriculture and has to be complementary to other Community policies to tackle the great problem of Europe's rural areas.

It is clear that in order to be effective, all programmes in this field have to be widely supported by training and dissemination of information, as appropriate to specific situations. This could promote an agricultural community more aware of the fact that it is in its own best interest to manage production in a more rational manner in order to attain a rational equilibrium between its needs and those of the environment.

Thanks to this training and dissemination of information, the farmer should become aware that his role is not limited to agricultural production in itself, but, that it also extends to the maintenance of the rural environment of which he is the manager. This implies that society has to accept the fact that the farmer, as manager of the environment, is rendering a public service which merits an adequate remuneration.

2. Timetable

On the basis of the elements discussed in the previous chapters and considering the state of the preparatory work already done, the Commission will as a first step and before the end of 1988, present the following proposals :

- the revision of the proposal for a Directive concerning the marketing of plant protection products (proposal presented in 1976)
- a proposal concerning the production and marketing of agricultural products and foodstuffs, obtained without the use of synthetic chemicals.
- a proposal for a Directive concerning the protection of fresh surface and ground waters and coastal waters against pollution from livestock manure and from overuse of nitrogenous compounds.
- the revision of the Directive concerning the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment.

In the short term, the Commission intends to promote a thorough study on the use of economic instruments as a means to reducing consumption of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, thus decreasing their impact on the environment, in particular on water resources.

In addition and in the framework of the reinforcement of its training and information actions the Commission will study the possibilities of

- reinforcing its financial participation in the application of existing measures
- ensuring the satisfactory coordination of the measures taken by the Member States
- promoting the awareness of farmers of the possibilities offered by the Community

Finally, the Commission, in addition to the proposals mentioned above, will stress, in the framework of the reform of the structural funds and in particular of EAGGF - Guidance Section, the need to promote alternative economic activities which will allow farmers to increase their income, whilst respecting the environmental requirements, protecting the rural environment and its traditional way of life (agritourism, hunting, game rearing, fishing etc.)