



European Commission
Directorate-General for Agriculture

Newsletter

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Rural development programmes 2000–06: an update

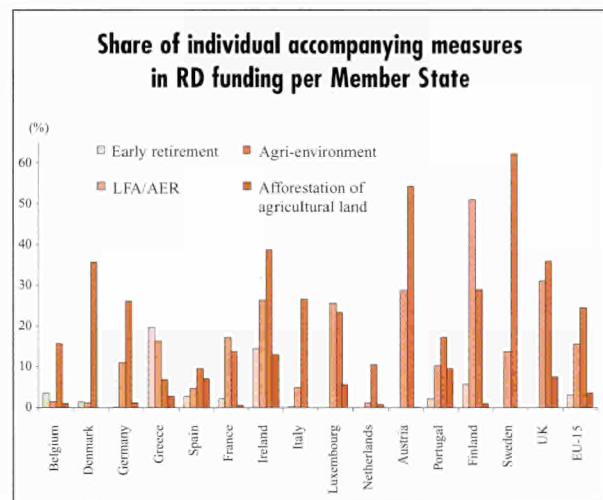
The European Commission adopted in October 2001 the last two of the 68 rural development programmes (RDPs) submitted by the Member States and financed under the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund (EAGGF) Guarantee Section ⁽¹⁾. The final approval of all the RDPs is a key stage in the introduction of the new strengthened rural development policy under Agenda 2000. The focus has now turned to the implementation on the ground of the programmes. The Directorate-General for Agriculture is already examining the first wave of modifications ⁽²⁾ to the RDPs that were adopted last year. The Commission approved the first formal programme modifications — for a series of German programmes — in July.

A principal aim of Community rural development policy is to allow Member States as much flexibility as possible in designing their programmes, allowing them to be tailored to the specific conditions and challenges facing their rural areas. An initial overview is now possible of how financial support for rural development will be allocated. The overall funds for the period 2000–06 amount to EUR 105 billion ⁽³⁾, or EUR 15 billion per year. This is being co-financed by the EU and the Member States, with almost half coming from EU funds. The EAGGF-Guarantee Section is providing EUR 4.7 billion a year and the EAGGF-Guidance Section some EUR 2.5 billion a year ⁽⁴⁾.

Where the money is being spent

At Community level, a large share of the overall rural development expenditure (nearly 50 %) has been allocated to the four so-called CAP ‘accompanying measures’ — agri-environment, early retirement schemes, afforestation of agricultural land and support for less favoured areas. However, planned spending on these

measures varies widely between Member States, for example accounting for over 90 % of rural development expenditure in Ireland but only 13 % in the Netherlands. Agri-environment measures are now a compulsory part of rural development programmes and out of the ‘menu’ of 22 rural development measures for which EU support is offered, it is the single measure which has attracted the highest share of financial resources. Average annual expenditure (EU and national) on agri-environment measures is planned to increase by 68 % from EUR 2.2 billion per annum in the 1994–99 period to EUR 3.7 billion per annum.



Source: Agriculture DG — F3, European Commission.

Annual reports

Most of the first annual reports for RDPs, for the year 2000, have now been delivered and are currently being studied by the Commission services. At the Gothenburg Summit in June 2001, the Commission undertook to present a summary annual report on the

⁽¹⁾ For further details of the rural development plans for each area, see the Agriculture DG's web site at: http://europa.eu.int/comm/agriculture/rur/index_en.htm.

⁽²⁾ Under EU legislation Member States have the option to modify their RDPs once a year.

⁽³⁾ Excluding Leader+.

⁽⁴⁾ For a fuller explanation of RD funding, see factsheet ‘CAP reform — rural development’ and Newsletter No 21.

implementation of the rural development programmes. This report will be presented every two years, beginning in 2002 and will be based on these annual reports from the Member States. In 2004, the Commission will also submit to the Agricultural Council an overview of the mid-term evaluations on the RDPs, which must be carried out by the Member States.

Leader+

The EAGGF-Guidance Section also finances the Community initiative for rural development for the period 2000–06, Leader+ ⁽⁵⁾. Leader+ aims to encourage and support a series of small-scale pilot

approaches to integrated rural development at a local level in selected areas across the EU. It also puts a strong emphasis on cooperation and networking between rural areas. Following the adoption of the general rural development programmes for 2000–06, the Commission is now in the process of approving Member States' Leader+ programmes involving total EU financial support of over EUR 2 billion in the period 2001–06. Some 73 programmes have been submitted, of which nearly half have now been adopted by the Commission. The selection of the Leader+ beneficiaries — local action groups — is already completed for some Member States/regions, or is currently under way in many others.

⁽⁵⁾ Commission Notice 2000/C 139/05 of 14 April 2000.

Fall in public confidence in the CAP

The Eurobarometer opinion poll ⁽¹⁾ carried out for the European Commission in May and June 2001 has confirmed that public confidence in the common agricultural policy (CAP) has been damaged by the outbreak of the foot-and-mouth disease and latest BSE crisis. A comparison between the answers from this poll and the two 'Flash' Eurobarometers ⁽²⁾ carried out in late 2000 showed an average drop of 10 % in positive responses, with a corresponding increase in 'don't know' answers. The survey was put to 16 029 members of the general public across the 15 Member States.

Those surveyed are still strongly in favour of the 12 policy objectives listed in the survey, for example, to ensure healthy and safe products (90 %), to promote respect for the environment (89 %) and to ensure stable and adequate incomes for farmers (77 %). However, when asked if they thought that the CAP performed these tasks well, the satisfaction levels were 37, 41 and 29 % respectively.

Replies to a specific question on food safety showed that only 36 % of those surveyed felt that EU agricultural policy ensured that the food they bought was safe to eat. Only 22 % felt that it gave enough information on how food is produced and processed, and only 18 % that it ensured good treatment of farm animals.

The 'don't know' responses to the 12 objectives ranged between 25 % and 35 %. This compares to a range of 7–13 % in October/November 2000. This uncertainty seems to have also affected attitudes to non-food-related issues. When asked about the switch in financial support from production to incomes, 56 % of those questioned in 2001 saw it as a good thing, compared to 75 % in late 2000.

The two 'Flash' Eurobarometers in 2000 revealed a widespread interest in agricultural issues among the general public as well as farmers.

⁽¹⁾ Full report available on the Agriculture DG's web site, http://europa.eu.int/comm/agriculture/survey/index_en.htm.

⁽²⁾ See Newsletter No 33 and the Agriculture DG's web site, http://europa.eu.int/comm/agriculture/survey/index_en.htm.



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