

Cross-compliance in Romania – obligations barely known by farmers and administration

The cross-compliance (CC) is a new set of obligations for the Romanian farmers receiving direct payments insufficiently promoted as administration preferred to talk on what is given and not on the obligations which are coming with.

The first transfer in terms of direct payments it is on its way (expected to occur these weeks) as last year Romania recorded a serious delay in collecting and verifying the SAPS (Single Area Payment Scheme) direct payments claims (operation finalised in December 2007). The preliminary situation of the eligible areas was sent at 31.01.2008 to the EC. A total of 1.240.000 farmers claimed direct payments in 2007 and according to APIA, a number of 445.000 farmers claimed payments on over-estimated plots! 58.000 farmers were object of random checks. The area continues to be larger than the total reference area at the end of the accession negotiations situation, which could drive to a proportional reduction of all payments.

The knowledge and the understanding of the farmers related to the CC is limited or absent as complete, coherent and understandable information critically lacks in rural areas. However this situation does not exonerate the obligations which farmers have induced to themselves buy claiming direct payments. The GAEC (Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition) is sometimes not known even by the people working in agricultural administration and even more by those working in extension services. The information is available on the Payment Agency website but we could imagine how many farmers do access that page!

A number of conditions and obligations from GAEC could be filled easier if a series of measures from the National Rural Development Programme (NRDP) would be available. The NRDP is still under consultations and it could be signed by EC right on the time of this videoconference. Agro-environment measures and certain measures from the Competitiveness Axe 1 could contribute to enforce the capacity of the farmers to comply with the GAEC.

Although we still do not have sufficient official information about the first round of payments it seems that a number of verifications conducted to the need of applying the reduction and exclusion of payments. The indirect information is coming from the demand of the Agency for Payment and Interventions in Agriculture, which now requires training for its personnel to recover the undue payments, including the court orders.

The Romanian IACS (Integrated Administration and Control System) still has severe operational issues as most efforts were spent in enabling the agency and developing the internal administrative capacity as part of EC conditions in granting access to the direct payments. The on-spot checks were concentrated on the declared area size and the cultivated crops and almost never on the environmental conditions, such as covered slopes during winter.

Not all areas which could positively benefit from CC are covered as not all properties are agriculturally exploited, which means not all agricultural area is covered by direct payments and so this land is excluded from a good maintenance. Moreover, in most situations these areas are encountering soil or landscape handicaps and natural threads, reasons for which the owners withdraw farming practices on it. In other situations, the age of the owners, the relatively high price of renting-in agricultural land (twice higher as in Bulgaria, for example), the remote residence (living far from the property), or most often, the lack of capital determined the owners to resume their activities and so the unmaintained land is excluded from direct payments and respectively from the cross-compliance.