

Conference on the Simplification of the CAP

WORKSHOP 3

Simplification of the CAP: Stakeholder's views

Farmers' views

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Some general statements

It is not easy to be critical about Commissions plans to simplify the CAP. Who could be against such targets as “reducing red tape in the farm sector” or “reduce the costs for businesses” or “to eliminate administrative obstacles”? However, we are not living in the simple world. The richness of the Europe is the great diversity between its regions. The same is true with European agriculture. There is a great variety of the different kind of multifunctional agriculture in Europe. There is a large choice of different sectors of agriculture in Europe. What might be a simplification for someone might be a reform for someone else. The policy should respond this situation. There are not always simple solutions in the complex world. However we all, not least the European farmers, admit that the CAP as it is today is too complicated and there is a need to make it more simple.

Among the European farmers the word “simplifying” has some historical burdens. Reputation of “simplifying” is not very good. In the previous CAP reforms the Commission has always aimed to “simplify” the policy. The positive word is always a good argument. Simplifying the policy was one of the main aims pointed out by the Commission when we were doing the 2003 CAP reform. Dear listeners, I can assure you that the

CAP today is much more complicated than before. Not least because of the new system of cross compliance.

The single CMO

The European farmers support the objective of simplifying or consolidating European agricultural legislation. However the ongoing reforms of certain CMOs, as well as any future developments in the CAP or reforms thereof, must be excluded from this exercise. This should be strictly technical exercise. The CMOs are there at achieving the objectives of the CAP, in particular, to stabilise markets, to ensure a fair living standard to farmers and to increase agricultural productivity. In the current sectoral CMOs there are often specific stipulations to meet the specific needs of the sector. As example of such specific provisions I could mention the intervention system for butter and powder or beef carcass classification grid or poultry marketing standards, and so on, and so on. Such specific market mechanisms laid down in the sectoral CMOs must be preserved.

European farmers are the main stakeholders in the CAP. Commission should identify more clearly which kind of benefits the simplification exercise brings to them. So far, many of the examples and success stories presented by the Commission are concentrated mainly on administration. For example simplification of the CAP budgetary system is something which does not influence a lot to farmers' live. In theory, the same is true with single CMO or the reform of the Commission's management committees. Finally, for farmers it is not so important how many market regulations there are or how many management committees there will be. More important is that the system works properly and that there should be no questioning of the market policies

falling under the first pillar of the CAP. Concerning the reduction of the numbers of the management committees, the practical risk might be the “human capacity”. Will there be enough good civil servants who have enough expertise to cover all agricultural sectors?

The cross compliance and controls

I mentioned already earlier the cross compliance. In the new CAP farmers may receive direct payments provided that they maintain their land in good agricultural conditions and comply with the standards on public health, animal and plant health, the environmental and animal welfare. Dear listeners, I might understand that there were some political reasons for this decision, but I can assure you that the system of cross compliance was really a big step towards making the life of European farmers more complicated. One can say that the cross compliance do not increase farmers’ burdens, since the legislation already existed. This is not true. The cross compliance brings lot of new controls to the farmers. If a farmer fails to comply with requirements he or she faces reductions in direct payments. In practise farmers will be facing situations open to various interpretations. I have been asked to give you some examples where to find good targets for simplification. I can reply that the cross compliance is a good example to start with. By example, the Commission may control 1% maximum of farms, at European level, and not control 1% of farm for each directive or regulation related to the cross-compliance.

Talking more generally on controls, I could say that reducing control burdens for farmers should be one of the priorities of the simplification exercise. If the Commission is speaking on simplification but if it is not speaking on controls, it will not be a simplification! Simplifying the control

process the life of farmers and agricultural businesses will be much easier. That I can really say on behalf of the European farmers. Some good examples for positive movement in this area can be found e.g. in France. There is a convention between farmers and the administration to manage the control on farms. The delay to inform the farmer, the type of controls and documents, and, as possible, regrouping the different controls are clearly defined in these. That is a good way to simplify the life of farmer and limits the administrative burden. In the same way, there are some regulations to the small failures. It is more constructive to address a warning or advice to farmer than to reduce immediately the amount of the direct payments.

Conclusions

To conclude my presentation I would like to repeat that:

- Despite of some scepticism, the European farmers welcome the idea of simplifying the CAP. If the Commission can guarantee that the simplification exercise will not be a step towards the CAP health check and future reforms, the European farmers and their organisations welcome the initiative.
- European farmers also support the Commissions plans to carry out the action plan and the further screening process on simplification.
- The single CMO process should be kept strictly technical level and it should not endanger the objectives of the CAP
- European farmers and agricultural organisations are looking forward to be able to give their contributions to this challenging work now and also

in the future. Good forum for such debate will be in the “ad-hoc” group on CAP’s simplification , which should be maintained also in the future.

Thank you for your attention!