

# Commission launches the debate on how European agriculture can adapt to climate change

- ↘ Summer rainfall
- ↗ Winter storms, floods
- ↗ Length growing season, yields
- ↗ Suitable farmland
- ↗ Pests, diseases risks

- ↗ Floods risk
- ↗ Hotter and drier summers
- ↗ Sea levels
- ↗ Risk crop pests, diseases
- ↗ Crop, forage yields
- ↘ Animal health, welfare

- ↗ Winter rainfall, floods
- ↘ Summer rainfall
- ↗ Risk drought, water stress
- ↗ Soil erosion risk
- ↗ Yields, range of crops

- ↘ Water availability
- ↗ Risk drought, heat spells
- ↗ Risk soil erosion
- ↘ Growing season, crop yields
- ↘ Optimal crop areas



A report presented by the European Commission in April 2009 has launched a debate on how the farm sector can overcome the challenges of climate change, and on how the Common Agricultural Policy can help it to do so.

*"Climate change is happening, and it's one of the greatest threats facing our planet, its population and its economies. Let's not kid ourselves that the problem will somehow leave European agriculture alone. In many ways, farming is in the front line in the fight against climate change. Without decisive action, many parts of the European Union will be exposed to much greater risk of droughts, floods, pests and crop failures which will greatly affect the stability of food production and prices".*

Mariann Fischer Boel, Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development.

## How will climate change affect European farming?

Rising atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> concentration, higher temperatures, changes in annual and seasonal rainfall patterns and in the frequency of extreme events – all these things will affect the volume, quality and stability of food production. As the map shows, these changes will give some farmers an advantage but will disadvantage others, while increasing the variability in climatic conditions for a wide variety of crops and livestock all over Europe.

The projected changes in the mean temperature are not expected to severely disturb agricultural production at the overall EU level before the middle of the century. Nevertheless, before then, we can expect increasingly negative impacts from sharper and less predictable variations in the weather, which will trigger greater variability in agricultural production, food prices and farm income.

Vulnerability to climate change varies widely across regions, depending on their exposure to adverse climate pressures and their capacity to find adaptive solutions. Therefore, climate change could further widen differences of income between the rural areas of Europe.

Adaptation to weather conditions has always been part of the history of agriculture. Farmers have already begun adapting farming practices and strategies in response to climatic variations – for instance, by adjusting sowing and harvesting dates, changing crop patterns, and taking out insurance against climate-related risks. However, in the coming decades, the climate challenge may overload the individual farmer's capacity to adapt. There will therefore be a need for broader sector-wide responses in order to maintain the strength and competitiveness of EU farmers.

## Next step: preparing farmers for climate change

Adaptation will not happen overnight. There is a need for careful analysis in order to anticipate the scope of the changes. Time is a factor and we already need to start developing adaptation strategies and dealing with uncertainties.

For the short term, the Commission proposes to focus on "no-regret" options such as:

- using water and soils more sustainably. Only by protecting the natural resource base on which agriculture depends can the sector build resilience to climatic variations;
- giving farmers the necessary skills to respond to future changes;
- improving co-operation and exchange of experience between Member States; and
- boosting support to research into agriculture and the climate.

The EU's future agricultural policy will also need to adapt. In November 2008, we took a step in the right direction by boosting funds to Rural Development projects that target new challenges and opportunities faced by European agriculture: climate change, better water management, protection of biodiversity, production of green energy and innovation in the four areas. This will continue in the future. The CAP must help to keep EU agriculture on a sustainable footing – so that European farmers continue to supply high-quality food, care for our landscapes and wider environment and contribute to the prosperity of our rural communities.

The report should provoke lively and valuable debate in a number of forums. We are looking forward to it!