

EUROPEAN AGRICULTURAL POLICY TOOK A WRONG TURN.

From my perspective, European agricultural policy took a wrong turn with the reforms started in 1993.

The EU cereal policy was blown up by the duty-free import of corn gluten feed. Instead of protecting its market the EU chose to lower its prices in combination with direct payments. The result is that our products are being dumped and that we have to live with the image of being subsidy addicts.

In the same time we lost the production of feed peas and now grow more cereals than ever!

The EU now produces only 23% of its consumption of plant protein.

The reforms are being "sold" with unfair arguments:

- direct payments for the "European model": one can not explain the relation with the amount of payments received and the contribution to the "model"
- the linkage with cross compliance. A linkage as logic as linking traffic rules and social security payments.
- "more market oriented": sounds good, but is unfair. I don't consider our sector as lazy or not-market oriented before the reforms.
- "decoupled": We must sow at least the same surface of "subsidy crops" as in the period of reference to cash our full payment. A dairy farmer gets more when he has a bigger quota. Such payments have an influence on the decisions of farmers and their banks. Saying those payments are not trade disturbing is not fair, to put it mildly.

During the debates about the sugar reform I noticed how demoralising the changes are. People in my neighbourhood realise how vulnerable they are with all those subsidies. Farmers deserve more dignity!

I don't blame in the first place the European decision makers for taking the wrong turn. I blame the farmers' representatives who supported that decision. Two examples: before the decision on Agenda 2000 a leader of French cereal producers asked for lower institutional prices and more direct payments. Otherwise their new found offices in Beijing and other places would not have enough business. Recently a leader of Dutch dairy farmers said that the dairy form and finally the end of the quota system would give the chance to regain a part of the world market. In both cases that sounds to me as "Give us taxpayers money so that we can make life of farmers elsewhere worse." The stories about the European model and the cross-compliance were made up afterwards. The work of farmers deserves a representation with more dignity than is performed by the friends of export oriented agribusiness.

A simpler CAP?

- Back with the good, old import duty. Applicable for all countries or groups of countries to protect their food production.
- No more surpluses with good supply management. Obligatory set aside is a simple tool. And is more reasonable nowadays because it can simply combine the goals of farm policy and energy policy by using land for set aside for energy crops.
- Direct payments only for real green services or as compensation for natural handicaps.

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