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Closing remarks

*Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort*

European Young Farmers' Day

Brussels, 17 April 2007

Ladies and gentlemen,

So here I am back at the podium, at the end of what has been a very full day! The organisation has been spotless and I understand that the webstreaming technology has worked as it was supposed to.

Therefore, once again, I would like to express my sincere thanks to everyone who has contributed to this excellent event. In particular, let me thank our chairmen, who have done a fantastic job; and also all of our speakers, our panellists, our rapporteurs, and our interpreters.

Of course, an event of this sort is nothing without its participants. You were open and honest in your comments. I never had the slightest sense that you were simply telling me what I wanted to hear!

My part of the bargain is to listen and reflect on the input that we have collected throughout the day. Let me however pick up briefly on some things that were said this morning.

I very much enjoyed Peter Papp's comments, so I'm glad that he could take time off from installing his biogas plant to be with us!

He is absolutely right that the modern farmer must be many different things: a businessman, a psychologist, a team-leader – essentially, an "agricultural entrepreneur". This does not mean that we should stop using the word "farmer", of course. But it does mean recognising the wide range of skills that must now be covered by this term.

Peter highlighted the value of exchange programmes for young farmers – as others did later on - and here also, I agree with him. In my view, the most suitable vehicle now available for organising such exchanges is the Leonardo Da Vinci Programme. This is a vocational training programme which is run by the Directorate-General for Education and Culture, and in which almost 80 000 people participate each year. (Some 7 000 young people involved in agriculture participated from 2000 to 2004.) Although the programme does not foresee "exchange" as such, two different organisations in different Member States can apply for training sessions at the farms of each other's members.

Let me also comment briefly on the workshops. I sat in briefly in all of them. But my staff have been following them all – taking lots of notes.

In workshop 1, there was a lot of talk about competitiveness, and how to achieve it. One issue which came up in connection with this was quality – which we tried to define more clearly. Participants also highlighted the importance of strong links throughout the food chain.

Competitiveness is an ongoing challenge: we can always raise our game here. On the other hand, we are no strangers to competitiveness, whether in bulk production or in high-quality markets. So there are lessons that we can learn from each other – not just from low-cost producers in third countries – and I'm sure that many of us have learned about useful techniques and ideas today.

In workshop 2, we looked at ways of providing public goods. We asked a number of questions. What are public goods? And what is their relationship with competitiveness? Again, more work is needed on these issues. If we want to spend public money on agriculture and rural development, we have to make sure that we have the most appropriate link in place between that money and public goods. Also, we have to make the link very clear to the public, to keep their support.

In workshop 3, we thought about new opportunities for the farming sector. Many of you saw substantial new possibilities in the biomass sector in particular. (I note that the food industry has anxieties about the possible impact of biomass production on

the prices of their raw materials; but at least higher prices won't be a source of complaint for farmers....) In any case, I hope that all the experiences and initiatives which you have heard about today have inspired you to go and try something new.

An issue which we discussed more generally today was: What do consumers want? And you identified that farmers and consumers need to be more aware of their links with each other.

For example, agricultural policy can link up with consumers' concerns about healthy lifestyles. I was exploring exactly this point this afternoon at a conference on obesity and fruit and vegetable consumption, and as you know, health has been a key element in my reform proposals for the fruit and vegetable sector.

The topics covered by all three workshops and our other discussions are important for the CAP Health Check and the Budget Review, which I mentioned this morning.

And I say again that, throughout this two-step exercise, there will be change, but I **am** also aware of the need for **stability and predictability**, when we can have these things. I know that, if you want to farm successfully, you have to be able to plan – as far ahead as possible.

This is why I'm consulting widely **now** on changes which I think will be necessary: so that the farming sector can know where it stands as soon as possible.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We're coming to the point where the microphones will be turned off. But our dialogue doesn't end there. I will look with great interest at your document "What future for agriculture?". And I also hope that as many of you as possible will come and join me for a drink in the meeting room in just a moment. If you have anything to say that really isn't fit for a microphone, this will be the time to say it!

Then, of course, after today, my door will always be open to young farmers, metaphorically and literally, and comments will always be welcome on my blog.

To all of you, and especially those of you whom I don't see personally before you leave, I say sincerely: have a safe journey home, thank you for coming, and thank you very much indeed for making today a resounding success!