

**Committee of the Regions****NAT-V-015****93rd plenary session
14 and 15 December 2011****OPINION
of the
Committee of the Regions****PROMOTING AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS****THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

- acknowledges the limited scope of the promotion measures applied to date outside the EU, and consequently urges the Commission to look at ways of recalibrating them, since the EU's lead in exporting agri-food products must be successfully maintained;
- agrees with the Commission on the need to strengthen local markets;
- considers that promotion of the European Food Model is not compatible with the use of genetically modified organisms and that there should be no place for policies promoting GMO-based products;
- advocates stepping up information on the health benefits of eating healthy and balanced food;
- would support initiatives for the extension of compulsory labelling of place of farming on produce;
- considers it vital to have specific information and promotion tools that are more effective than the present ones, ensuring a rapid response to crises so as to regain the confidence of consumers and transmit this confidence to producers;
- believes that the choice of programmes should not be made exclusively at European level and calls for the regions to be involved in the selection processes and for them to drive proposals, given their knowledge of local players and markets and, in particular, of small-scale production;
- is of the view that when negotiating international agreements, the Commission must take heed of the interests of European agri-food producers;
- believes that, in order to ensure greater effectiveness, the promotion measures introduced directly by the Commission should be better coordinated with those implemented by producers via multi-annual programmes;
- considers that it should be possible for any product from the EU, with the exception of tobacco and spirit drinks, to be covered by the promotion system, although it believes that priority should be given to measures for products that contribute to a healthy, balanced diet and to those for other products that have differentiated quality indications linking them geographically to Europe.

Rapporteur

Mr Pedro Sanz Alonso (ES/EPP), President of the Regional Government of La Rioja

Reference document

Green Paper on promotion measures and information provision for agricultural products: a reinforced value-added European strategy for promoting the tastes of Europe
COM(2011) 436 final

I. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS,

General aspects

1. has carefully examined the Green Paper on *promotion measures and information provision for agricultural products: a reinforced value-added European strategy for promoting the tastes of Europe* and warmly welcomes this initiative;
2. considers that the European agricultural sector is crucial to the development of local and regional economies, making a very significant contribution to job creation and enabling populations to stay in rural areas, and also considers that this policy is crucial to consolidating the sector's activity;
3. agrees that the strides made by EU producers in the areas of sanitation, the environment or animal welfare, and on products covered by European quality systems (PGI, PDO, TSG, organically farmed products), are not always known to or recognised by the market, which can lead to some frustration among producers;
4. believes that Europe's production model clearly sets it apart from competitor countries, and that this model therefore needs to be promoted in order to make it better known;
5. is aware that the EU possesses a world-class heritage in the diversity of its agri-food products, and that this must be harnessed and publicised both within and beyond the European Union;
6. notes that regions and regional authorities are key partners in rural development and the development of local markets and that they offer indispensable support in organising the collective promotion of small-scale production and local markets;
7. is pleased that the promotion policy so far pursued has been able to help win back consumer confidence in the wake of events such as the dioxin and BSE crises, although it considers that this policy should be equipped with far more agile and time-efficient information tools so that it can help to resolve emergencies such as the *E.Coli* outbreak more rapidly and thereby restore consumer confidence as quickly as possible;
8. acknowledges the limited scope of the promotion measures applied to date outside the EU, and consequently urges the Commission to look at ways of recalibrating them, since the EU's lead in exporting agri-food products must be successfully maintained;
9. feels that the existing strategy should be developed more in line with the aims of the policies concerning quality in both the EU and the individual Member States because of the different preconditions regarding production and marketing. In particular, the existing rules should be

made much more flexible and the application and settlement process streamlined so that EU promotion measures can be used more efficiently and effectively;

10. points out that, in view of the developments in EU sales promotion, EU quality policy and CAP reform, existing EU legal requirements concerning sales promotion measures in the Member States, the regulatory framework for state aid in the agricultural and forestry sector for the period 2007-2013 and Commission Regulation No 1857/2006 on the application of Articles 87 and 88 of the EC Treaty to state aid for small and medium-sized firms active in the production of agricultural products should be reviewed in the light of the above-mentioned objectives and preconditions;
11. agrees that the multi-country and multi-product initiatives have proved unattractive, and calls upon the Commission to look closely at the underlying causes, and to continue supporting such programmes, particularly the multi-product programmes;

What should the aims of the agricultural product information and promotion policy be and what contribution should it make?

12. considers that promoting European agricultural and agri-food products, whether on the internal market or in third countries, is a good way of boosting employment in rural areas, given that production and processing are closely linked to specific places and that this geographical dimension should remain a key element in the bid to secure the balanced development of Europe's regions;
13. agrees that information and promotion policy for agri-food products must be ambitious, have a differentiated strategic approach according to the product and market concerned, and ensure due complementarity between all currently available instruments in order to achieve greater synergies and boost their effectiveness;
14. feels that, in future, sales promotion possibilities must go beyond merely representing a generic European image and that it must be made much easier: to indicate collective brands, including territorial brands, not least those promoted by regions and meeting precise specifications, to indicate geographical origin and mode of production, and for small and medium-sized firms to have access to funding. Anyone who wants consumers in both the internal market and in non-EU countries to develop a taste for something must also support the emergence of brand loyalty;
15. points to the need for one of the aims of information and promotion policy to be that of restoring consumer confidence, both within the EU and beyond, in the event of any future food crises;
16. would welcome further steps to inform consumers of the meaning of quality certificates;

What information and promotion measures should be put in place to develop stronger local and regional markets?

17. agrees with the Commission on the need to strengthen local markets with policies that draw attention to both the diversity of local products and their social, cultural and historical links with consumers in the territories or regions where they are produced, as well as their contribution to improved environmental performance as a result of lower CO₂ emissions at the transport, processing and packaging stages;
18. advocates harnessing synergies between regional and local market support instruments and the other European funds: this can be achieved by including measures for these markets in the various rural development programmes, using a LEADER-type approach. To this end, the Commission must press for all rural development programmes in the European regions to include measures to foster strategies associated with the development of local markets, disseminate "slow food"-type strategies, encourage the consumption of locally-sourced food, zero food-miles cooking, etc., and to promote a closer link between producers and consumers;
19. stresses the importance of supporting and promoting high-quality agricultural products from less favoured areas of the European Union such as upland regions, outermost regions, remote regions, islands, etc., in order to encourage their production in the longer term, especially in light of the state aid debate on the issue of sometimes decidedly unfavourable production and promotion conditions requiring greater financial support;
20. considers that promotion of the European Food Model is not compatible with the use of genetically modified organisms and that there should be no place for policies promoting GMO-based products;

What are the specific needs in relation to information on and promotion of European products and what should the aims be in the internal market?

21. agrees on the need to make a special effort to publicise European quality systems (PDO, PGI, TSG and organic farming) not only among consumers but increasingly among producers too, highlighting the features that differentiate them from other products and the advantages to be gained from producing, acquiring and consuming them;
22. regrets that the draft regulations for the post-2013 CAP presented by the European Commission, and more specifically the EAFRD regulation, provide no instruments for promoting high-quality products (there is no equivalent to Axis 1, Article 33) while full use has yet to be made of the Green Paper consultation on the promotion of agricultural products. It calls for concrete proposals to be framed to replace the current measures, for the draft regulations on the post-2013 CAP to continue to provide for promotional measures, with improvements for high-quality products, and for the two reforms' timetables to be lined up;

23. advocates stepping up information on the health benefits of eating healthy and balanced food, and urges that extra efforts be made with regard to the younger sectors of the population. To this end, school campaigns on healthy, balanced eating could be stepped up and supported with added focus on making locally-produced healthy food products available to students;
24. would support initiatives for the extension of compulsory labelling of place of farming on produce and would encourage similar labelling initiatives designed for the catering trade;
25. considers it vital to have specific information and promotion tools that are more effective than the present ones, ensuring a rapid response to crises so as to regain the confidence of consumers and transmit this confidence to producers;

What measures should be developed to achieve the aims set and thus optimise the European Union intervention in the internal market?

26. considers that the measures to be developed within the EU must use all available marketing and media tools, selecting the most effective ones in each case depending on the message to be conveyed and the target audience, and considers access to these tools for all agricultural producers either individually or collectively to be essential;
27. believes that the choice of programmes should not be made exclusively at European level. Past experience shows that involving the Member States directly in the choice of programmes leads to a higher degree of acceptance and motivation among applicants and programme participants. At the same time, this is in keeping with the principle of subsidiarity and takes better account of the situation on the ground;
28. with this in mind, calls for the regions to be involved in the selection processes and for them to drive proposals, given their knowledge of local players and markets and, in particular, of small-scale production. The regions provide critical support for and sometimes even initiate collective marketing operations for small producers and small-scale production;
29. believes there is a need to conduct generic campaigns publicising the advantages of consuming products from the European Union on account of their quality, safety, environment-friendliness and animal welfare aspects that stem from stringent obligatory production standards, not to mention even more stringent standards established by Member States through voluntary product specifications. It strongly urges that, in the case of geographical indications, mention be made of any aspects that link a product to its Member State or region of origin;
30. considers that, with a view to incorporating a European dimension, all promotion measures financed directly by the European Commission, whether generic or for specific products or product ranges, should feature slogans, common messages or shared values to be drawn up by the Commission;

31. welcomes the European Commission's proposal to set up a European platform for exchanging good practices that would help to improve the design and definition of multi-country programmes;

What are the specific needs in terms of information on and promotion of European products and what should the aims be in the external market?

32. draws the Commission's attention to the fact that the European agri-food sector is putting major efforts into external promotion. The EU has a very significant official role to play in facilitating entry into and consolidation on external markets through official promotion and information campaigns, and suggests that when defining such campaigns, the Commission should always take account of the differing situations in the Member States and between European agri-food sector operators;

33. is of the view that when negotiating international agreements, the Commission must take heed of the interests of European agri-food producers and put promotion measures in place in those countries with which it concludes agreements, in order to ensure sufficiently broad and deep penetration of their markets;

34. considers that the future of the CAP is linked to the future EU trade policy, therefore to achieve an effective promotion in external markets, the European Commission should step up its efforts to ensure that there is a level playing field in the context of the WTO and insist on the need to step up protection of Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) and Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) in the context of the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreements (ACTA);

35. one of the better ways of safeguarding EU agri-food products is to ensure that all foods sold in the EU (including imports) are subject to the same or equivalent food hygiene and food safety regimes;

What measures should be developed to achieve the aims set and thus optimise the European Union's intervention in the external market?

36. believes that, in order to ensure greater effectiveness, the promotion measures introduced directly by the Commission should be better coordinated with those implemented by producers via multi-annual programmes;

37. urges the Commission to step up and extend support measures for European Union producers on external markets by means of a varied and flexible catalogue of measures, tailored to the individual markets targeted and the types of products promoted;

38. considers it crucial to introduce measures enabling SMEs to gain readier access to marketing processes on the external market, in particular via the internet. Setting up networks could be helpful in this regard. Giving higher priority or more concentrated aid to measures undertaken by small and medium-sized groups of businesses might also be envisaged;

Who should benefit? Should priority be given to certain beneficiaries?

39. is aware of the difficulty involved in private stakeholders making a financial contribution to generic promotion campaigns intended to promote or provide information on the European production model or quality systems. Such campaigns should therefore be conducted and financed by the Commission;
40. stresses that effective sales promotion cannot be assured only by sector and inter-professional sector organisations, as is stipulated in the present rules, and that Member States' institutions, particularly their regional collective marketing companies promoting high-quality food and agricultural products, must also be allowed to become involved on an equal footing;
41. takes a positive view of the measure to promote wine in third countries, and thinks that this model could be applied to other products. This would enable private actors to gain access to external promotion, which is seen as necessary in sectors that are poorly structured or lack representative organisations;

Are there any conceivable synergies between the various promotion and information tools available to the EU?

42. believes that the distinction between each of the existing promotion measures should be maintained, as each of them matches a particular product or product range and fits a specific situation in terms of the size of the sector, how structured it is, the target market etc., and that specific information and promotion measures should be retained in addition to the horizontal system;
43. by the same token, calls on the Commission to ensure consistency between the packages of measures under quality policy and promotion policy;

Which agricultural and agri-food products should be eligible and what criteria should be used to decide?

44. considers that it should be possible for any product from the EU, with the exception of tobacco and spirit drinks, to be covered by the promotion system, although it believes that priority should be given to measures for products that contribute to a healthy, balanced diet, such as fruit and vegetables, milk, olive oil, etc., and to those for other products that have differentiated quality indications linking them geographically to Europe;

To be more incisive, which means of promotion should be used?

45. shares the Commission's positive view of combining key messages, to be drawn up by the Commission and included in all promotion measures highlighting both the European production system and the benefits of a healthy, balanced diet, with specific messages for product ranges, with a view to publicising the European agri-food heritage with all its diversity, tradition and quality;
46. notes that the procedure should be made more flexible in many ways so as to be able, in particular, to react to short-term developments on the relevant markets. Measures should include a timely adjustment of directives, more opportunities for resource redeployment without an additional contract, a better adaptation of current programmes to changing market trends, less insistence on details in the programme application and faster decisions by the Commission;
47. considers that the product's origin should be highlighted whenever possible, without obscuring the reference to the European Union;
48. believes in particular that collective brands, including territorial brands, not least those backed by regions and meeting precise specifications, may be used. It might also be useful in future for sales promotion possibilities to go beyond merely representing a generic European image and it must be made easier, especially for small and medium-sized firms, for brands and producers to be named in addition to the exceptions so far allowed, provided that:
 - they are included in or linked to the promotion of a collective brand; and
 - the private brands associated with the operation cannot directly receive European funding;
49. considers that European-level professional organisations can and must play an important role as a catalyst for the *multi-country programmes*, but that management procedures and structures must be made more flexible for this purpose;

What should Europe's budget be to ensure we can achieve our objectives?

50. agrees that programmes should continue to be co-financed, and that in specific cases the rate could exceed the current 50% ceiling, primarily for external promotion measures. Regarding the necessary budget, it suggests that the Commission should look at the resources deployed by the EU's competitor nations, such as the US, and put forward an estimate of the budget needed in this light.

Brussels, 14 December 2011

The President
of the Committee of the Regions

Mercedes Bresso

The Secretary-General
of the Committee of the Regions

Gerhard Stahl

II. PROCEDURE

Title	Green Paper on promotion measures and information provision for agricultural products: a reinforced value-added European strategy for promoting the tastes of Europe
Reference	COM(2011) 436 final
Legal basis	Article 307(1) TFEU
Procedural basis	Optional referral
Date of Council referral/Date of Commission letter	
Date of President's decision	12 July 2011
Commission responsible	Commission for Natural Resources (NAT)
Rapporteur	Mr Pedro Sanz Alonso (ES/EPP) President of the Regional Government of La Rioja
Analysis	22 July 2011
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Previous Committee opinions	