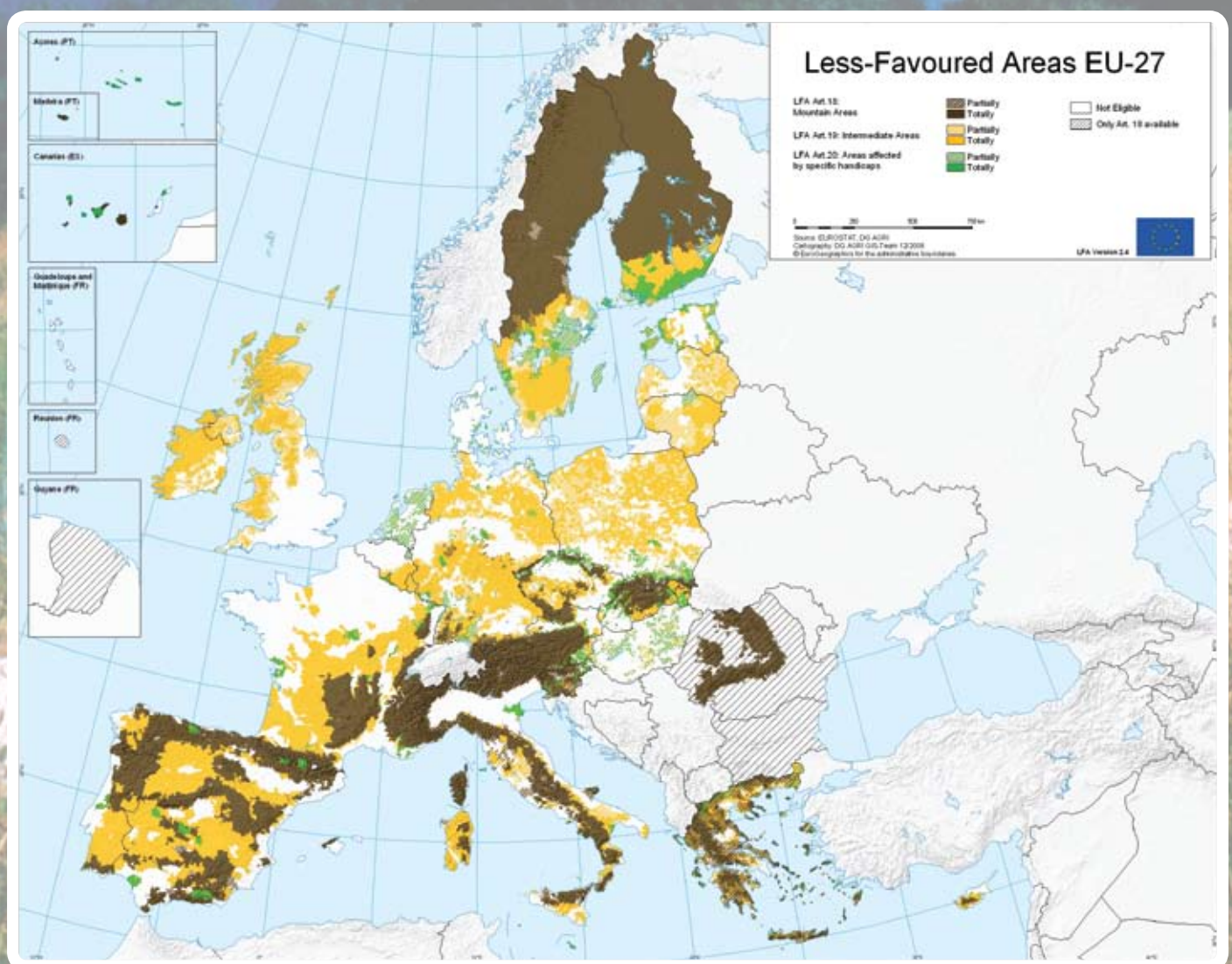




## Less Favoured Areas: Commission intensifies cooperation with national authorities in order to simplify and better target the aid.

On 21 April 2009 the European Commission adopted a Communication paving the way for a new classification of agricultural areas with natural handicaps. With the help of scientific experts, the Commission has identified 8 soil and climate criteria as a basis for objectively and clearly classifying such areas. However, before presenting a legislative proposal, the Commission needs more data to assess their feasibility. Therefore, Member States are asked to provide simulations using national data to show how the criteria might work. The new classification system is likely to be in place in 2014; meanwhile the current system remains in force.



“The delimitation of areas with natural handicaps for agriculture needs to be rationalized and the aid better targeted. It is in the interest of farmers and of all of us that these areas continue to be farmed so as to prevent environmental damage”, said Mariann Fischer Boel, Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development. “The objective is not to reduce or to enlarge the less favoured areas, but to set up a delimitation system which is clear and transparent, while taking into account the peculiarities of an area as large and diverse as the EU.”

### A simpler and transparent area delimitation

Across the EU there are currently over 100 very different national criteria for judging whether an area can receive a less favoured area payment. This diversity was spotlighted by the Court of Auditors as a possible source of unequal treatment. With the help of scientific experts, the Commission has identified 8 soil and climate criteria that may be a good basis for objectively and clearly classifying such areas.

However, the feasibility of a new delimitation based on these criteria needs to be assessed on the basis of simulations carried out by Member States using detailed national data.

### Improved targeting

In order to preserve landscapes, natural habitats and biodiversity; to prevent forest fires and to improve water and soil management, it is crucial to maintain sustainable farming systems in areas where climate and soil make this difficult.

EU subsidies to preserve farming in such areas should be reserved for those areas where natural handicaps are severe and affect farming. The way aid is distributed to farms in these areas should also target farms most at risk of land abandonment.

### Intense cooperation

More than 100 meetings took place between the Commission and the Member States and 121 contributions were received following a public consultation launched on 22 May 2008. They are summarized in the impact assessment accompanying the Communication.

The Communication adopted today further involves EU institutions, regions and groups interested in agricultural land-use in the analysis leading to a new area delimitation.

Member States are further associated by performing simulations that will be crucial for the preparation of the Commission proposal.

### Limited scope

This review exercise does not affect mountain areas (already classified based on objective common criteria) or areas with specific handicaps (e.g. islands and coastal areas) which are classified according to those specific handicaps.

### Next steps

National authorities should send their simulations to the Commission by 21 October 2009. The new classification system is likely to be in place in 2014.



- Commission webpage on the aid to farmers in Less Favoured Areas: [http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rurdev/lfa/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rurdev/lfa/index_en.htm)
- Commission webpage on Rural Development Policy 2007-2013 [http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rurdev/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rurdev/index_en.htm)



<http://blogs.ec.europa.eu/fischer-boel>

