

## Simplification of the CAP

### *The Harvest Experience Programme*

The Harvest Experience programme was first announced in 2009, in the Commission Communication "A Simplified CAP for Europe – a success for all". It is a training programme which allows staff members of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development to gain hands-on experience through visits to farmers and other stakeholders in the agricultural sector.

The programme has for objective to give officials a deepened understanding of the reality on the field and of the challenges faced by the agricultural sector, so as to make them better placed to draft policies and legislation that connect with that reality. It is also meant to contribute to the work of developing practical ideas for simplifying the CAP and reducing administrative burdens.

In general, the Harvest Experience involves a farm stay, during which the participant follows the daily farming activities. The participants are also expected to meet with local or regional stakeholders, such as cooperatives, advisory services, regional departments of paying agencies, local branches of farmers' organisations etc. Even if the main focus is on farming, the visits could also target other areas concerned by CAP legislation, such as agricultural trade or processing.

The implementation of the programme started in 2010. The evaluation made of the programme, as it stands after the first year of its implementation, shows very satisfactory results. To engage in an open and informal dialogue with farmers and other stakeholders, and to experience how the CAP legislation is being implemented in practice, is clearly useful for the professional activities of DG AGRI staff and helps keeping simplification aspects in mind when developing new policies. The Harvest Experience has proven to be a useful tool, not only for reaching simplification objectives but also for enhancing the communication with farmers, other stakeholders and national authorities.