

2nd Med Macro-Regional Network Cluster meeting, 17 October 2012

Speech of the Director of the Department of Agriculture, Dr. A. Georgiou

Dear All,

It is a great pleasure to have you all here today to participate in the 2nd Mediterranean macro-regional network cluster meeting that takes place in Cyprus. We strongly believe that this attempt, to bring the Networks of the Mediterranean area together to cooperate, to discuss about different issues, problems and come up with common conclusions and actions, is a very important initiative that is necessary to continue.

Having as a very good example the Nord Baltic Network cooperation, we have to work together, learn from each other and share experiences. It is for sure a great opportunity to deal with the future challenges in agriculture as a team.

Today's meeting will firstly address quality schemes looking into the results of the survey that was carried out by the Italian National Rural Network on developing Mediterranean quality products. The aim is to evaluate these results accordingly and ultimately use them within the framework of the Common Agricultural Policy post 2013.

The second part of the meeting will deal with Short Food Supply Chains. This is a new concept for Cyprus and it is the first time an event on this issue has been organized in Cyprus. We are very happy to have with us today speakers from the European Network for Rural Development, from academia, as well as from the National Rural Networks of the Mediterranean Member States, each one putting forward their own perspective and experience. This will greatly contribute towards obtaining a more complete picture of this issue in the search for ways to go forward in a successful way.

Short supply chains and local systems in the food sector have a great potential and have been included in the Commission proposal on Rural Development for the next programming period 2014-2020 currently under discussion with the Council and the European Parliament.

According to a Eurobarometer survey that was carried out in 2011 on what Europeans think of agriculture and the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), out of a sample of about 26 700 European citizens, nine out of ten people agreed that buying local foods is beneficial and that the EU should promote its availability.

The benefits of selling local foods are multifold and relate to the environmental, social and economic challenges that our society faces at the moment. Firstly, and as far as consumers are concerned, they are currently in search of quality and traditional products that come directly from a farm close to where they live instead of products that need to travel via complicated distribution channels before reaching the final consumer. Furthermore, consumers are beginning to look for a direct relationship with producers. This direct communication is very important because it allows for the gradual building of consumer confidence towards the producer and also initiates a social dialogue among citizens on quality, safety and locality of foods.

Additionally, and as far as producers are concerned, short supply chains create an extra value which is much needed by the farming sector. Short supply chains, as a type of marketing, not only allow producers to better understand consumer preferences and therefore to adapt accordingly, they are also a way to increase producers' income through benefiting from the added value that is gained through the decrease in middlemen.

Finally, I see this meeting as a good opportunity to exchange views and experiences amongst us in regards to local foods and short supply chains as an exercise for the preparation of the rural development program that each one of the Member States will need to establish for the next programming period.

Thank you very much for attending and I wish you a fruitful meeting.