

CAP post-2013 / summary of comments from Finnish rural network

The members of the monitoring committee of the Rural Development Programme for Mainland Finland, strategy group for rural development, working group on agri-environment payments, working group on animal welfare payments and guidance group on rural network and its working groups and the local action groups were asked to state their views on how the agricultural policy of the EU should be implemented after 2013. Replies came from Finnish Federation for the Animal Welfare Associations (SEY), the Finnish Association for Nature Conservation (SLL), Finnish Food Safety Authority (Evira), National Council of Women in Finland (NJKL), Birdlife Finland (BLF), and six local action groups (LAGs). In addition, communication on the consultation was circulated widely.

Why do we need a European common agricultural policy?

A common agricultural policy is needed to ensure equitable development of rural regions in different parts of the Union despite the natural handicaps or economic situation and preconditions for rural development in different countries. Through a common agricultural policy the values prevailing in the societies within the EU – relating to e.g. environmental protection, conditions of animals or working conditions – are realised better in farming than in a situation where agricultural practices would only be steered by the market mechanisms. Policy is also needed to give even better access than today for those engaged in agriculture to know-how that improves their possibilities to operate in a way desired by the society (SEY). Minimum requirements concerning the environment that are binding on all Member States are also needed (SLL). The agricultural policy which is fundamentally common to all Member States needs to continue. There is severe threat that those Member States who decide to heavily support environmentally sound production will be losing on the free market in the short run (BLF). In the future, too, the main objective must be to secure the food supply by means of economically sustainable agricultural production. Profitable production can be ensured through rural development by e.g. supporting genuinely innovative business ideas and development projects in situations where the funds for development would such funds would otherwise not be available or they would be insufficient (Evira). A common policy guarantees a consistent development of the European countryside, as well as the success of the less-favoured areas as well. The consumer confidence in safe foodstuffs may not be betrayed. (NJKL). A common policy should maintain a fair competitive situation between farms and allow to practice agriculture in all parts of the Union. The need for a common agricultural and rural policy brings the EU Member States, residents and rural entrepreneurs on a more equal standing. Now the problem is the predominant position of agriculture in rural development. The concentration of these policies within the EU means that they are not so easily moved by national political ambitions, which may vary very rapidly (LAGs).

What do citizens expect from agriculture?

The objective is to maintain a viable countryside and viable and competitive agricultural production, especially the livestock sector, in different parts of the Union, ensure food safety and improve animal welfare. In addition, we must protect the environment (loading of waters from agricultural sources, reducing environmental damage due to pesticides, reducing emissions which contribute to climate change, preservation of the biodiversity of flora and fauna) (SEY). Citizens expect food produced sustainably – with respect to the long-term resources; ethically – without unnecessary, market-driven, cruelty to production animals; safe and healthy food; farmed landscapes which sustain biodiversity and cultural appeal; rural employment, also outside production of biomass (BLF). Agricultural and rural policy must be multifunctional; sustainable food production cannot be the only objective. Climate change should be stopped and we must adapt to it, decline in biodiversity in agricultural environments must be stopped, a good status of waters must be reached and the livelihoods must be sustainable. In rural areas payments should be available for the production of ecosystem services and support should be directed to areas which are capable of producing such services in a sustainable manner (SLL). The common denominator for agriculture and the society is functioning food supply. The objectives of rural development must comprise both securing the food supply and promoting urban-rural interaction (Evira). Agriculture is still the backbone of the countryside. Without profitable agriculture there would hardly be a living countryside. We must ensure a proper income level for farmers and the rural population and the viability of the countryside, also in the

future (NJKL). The main interest of the society in agriculture is to maintain the highest possible level of self-sufficiency in primary production and food processing. This must cause as little burden on the environment as possible. The purpose of the support for rural development co-funded by the EU is to lower the threshold to test and start up new kinds of operations and practices and, to a smaller extent, also to maintain the existing structures. Pure, disease-free agricultural production must be ensured in all EU countries. The loss of jobs must be compensated for by developing other sectors and creating new jobs, thus preventing the rural depopulation and underutilisation of resources. Agriculture and industries processing its products are needed in all areas; they cannot be outsourced to the best production regions only. Rural development is needed to maintain services necessary for rural livelihoods and residents (LAGs).

Why reform the CAP?

Many forms of agriculture continue to harm the environment. The present CAP is mostly untargeted, with direct payments based on historical criteria heavily skewed in favour of the most intensive farms in most intensive regions with high negative externalities and low employment. Support should be targeted above all to the farming systems and regions that produce the most positive externalities, and not just "cheap" food. Customers who support national food production are able to vote with their purchases. To insure food security, national production of the key staple foods should be supported only within the national demand, not as export commodity (BLF). Agricultural production must be developed into modern food production, with due support for animal welfare, biological diversity, and social well-being of the people (SEY). Thanks to the EU policy practised so far some progress has been made, but most of the problems in the conditions where production animals are kept still persist also in the EU countries (SEY). One particular problem is the poor targeting of the payments (SLL). The outlines for agricultural policy and rural development must be consistent with the expectations and objectives of the society relating to food safety and animal and plant health. In the dialogue between the rural and urban areas it is important to ensure in the future that the consumers know how the food is produced and what the costs consist of (Evira). In the future the EU should focus more on dismantling bureaucracy in both rural development and agricultural support payments, so that various kinds of development actions could be applied to create a lot of new kinds and innovative business activities in the countryside. Women are still in a weaker position than men in agricultural and rural policy decision-making. Many women are still not "officially" employed on farms, which means that they are not covered by e.g. the legislation on occupational safety (NJKL). The regulatory basis of rural development should be eased and the practices of the EU should be changed so that the planned action corresponds to the intended purpose. The earlier programme evaluations show the need for more customised development policy which identifies the special characteristics of the areas. This is supported by the introduction of the three-stage rural typology of the EU. The future agricultural policy must be supported by more extensive rural policy. Rural development should come closer to the general regional development, but sufficient development funding should be allocated to the rural areas. Leader methodology should be extended to all regional development. The present CAP support is costly and unjust, while the rural development policy is better on the right track (LAGs).

What tools do we need for the CAP of tomorrow?

What we need is a contract system under which payments are based on a written agreement between the society and the recipient. These should be time-bound and specify the farm's eligibility criteria, any preconditions (in terms of the mandatory baseline) and the specific commitments for environment / culture etc. made by the recipient. National targeting could be based on such criteria as location, farming type, presence of particular environmental problems or assets. A system similar to the 2nd pillar should be applied (BLF). Investment aids, support for local breeds, agri-environment payments, support for rural infrastructure, i.e. more resources to economic support for agricultural producers whose practices are clearly closer to the desirable situation than the average. Improving communication and access to information, e.g. further development of the content of the advisory services offered to agricultural producers. There is a lot of research information through which considerable improvements could be achieved, at a reasonable cost, in the existing production buildings and even greater improvements in the planning stage of new buildings. In the present project support system the support is targeted to isolated small projects with a short lifespan and no continuation in the future. At the same time any other types of rural development strive to cope with

private funding obtained from financing of the sale of services, while a "new" invention obtains project or development funding. The objective of the EU funding for rural development should be to maintain the existing development systems which support the infrastructure, countryside and agricultural production, instead of only funding new ideas (SEY). Agricultural policy must be linked to the most important environmental challenges: climate change mitigation, halting the decline in biological diversity, reaching a good status of waters and ensuring ecosystem services. Investments must be targeted to environmentally and animal-friendly production. Efforts to realise partnerships must be continued. In production the aim must be to achieve closed cycles (SLL). Funds allocated to agriculture and rural development must be targeted to ensuring the preconditions for food production in a way that combines food safety, animal welfare, plant health and sustainable use and development of the environment (Evira). The Union must continue to ensure that the production is maintained also in the less-favoured areas and the countryside stays viable (NJKL). The activity must be characteristic to the area, regulation should be minimised, development does not work properly without freedom, decision-making on rural development should be as close to the local people as possible. Based on evaluations, the bottom-up tools have succeeded well in development policy. Efficient application of the Leader methodology must be ensured in all axes and the possible obstacles must be removed. Clear, simple and easily manageable development programmes and less but better administration. Simplification of bureaucracy, reinforcing local action groups as development organisations, better cooperation between different policy sectors. Rural development policy needs to be taken even further towards the Leader work and global grant model, more attention to the local conditions and utilisation of local know-how is needed in agricultural policy (LAGs).