



## Professor: EU's agricultural policy needs to become more sustainable

**Making the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) more sustainable will be vital for environmental as well as economic reasons, professor Alan Matthews told the EP's agricultural committee. The Commission proposes to reform the CAP in order to introduce more sustainable practices by giving farmers financial incentives to change the way they operate. Professor Matthews, of Trinity College in Dublin, said in a report he presented to the committee on 19 March that doing so was urgently needed.**

### European Commission proposal

The Commission wants to make agriculture in Europe more competitive and sustainable. It proposes to make 30% of the overall direct payments to farmers who meet specific environmental requirements such as farming organically, crop diversification and creating ecological focus areas (see fact box on the right).

### Allen Matthews's report

Professor Matthews examined the proposal's impact and researched possible alternatives. He highlighted several positive elements, such as it not involving additional costs, so there was no need to postpone action on it. The plan would define and fund mandatory green standards for the whole of the EU. Ecological focus areas would help to preserve biodiversity and quality, while targeted measures should be pursued, even if some member states would benefit more from them than others.

However, professor Matthews said there were still questions that needed answering, such as would the greening scheme be mandatory for farmers. The proposal indicates there will be two payments: one for green issues and one for general farming support. Why are there two payments? Professor Matthews also said more money should be made available, for example the green aspects could be covered by the EU's long-term budget. He also questioned whether it would be fair as organic farmers are already green by definition.

### Next steps

Together with the Council, the European Parliament will have to approve the proposal. The agricultural committee, which is responsible for drafting a recommendation to MEPs, will discuss the plan again on 27 March. Many MEPs have said there can be no final vote on the reform package without final figures of the EU's long-term budget for 2014-2020.

#### What is an ecological focus area?

- Ecological focus areas are designed to deliver ecosystem services that also benefit people
- Biodiversity, water and soil are protected in these areas
- They are aimed at long-term safety and sustainability of production
- European Commission wants farmers to keep 7% of their land as ecological focus area