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REPORT

on agriculture and agricultural research in the framework of CAP reform
(2003/2052(INI))

Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development

Rapporteur: Friedrich-Wilhelm Graefe zu Baringdorf

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PROCEDURAL PAGE

At the sitting of 15 May 2003 the President of Parliament announced that the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development had been authorised to draw up an own-initiative report under Rule 163 on agriculture and agricultural research in the framework of CAP reform.

The committee appointed Friedrich-Wilhelm Graefe zu Baringdorf rapporteur at its meeting of 20 May 2003.

It considered the draft report at its meetings of 7 October 2003, 24 November 2003 and 22 January 2004.

At the last meeting it adopted the draft resolution unanimously.

The following were present for the vote: Joseph Daul, chairman; Albert Jan Maat, vice-chairman; Friedrich-Wilhelm Graefe zu Baringdorf, vice-chairman and rapporteur; Gordon J. Adam, Alexandros Baltas (for Jean-Claude Fruteau), Reimer Böge (for Michl Ebner), Francesco Fiori, Georges Garot, Lutz Goepel, Willi Görlach, João Gouveia, María Esther Herranz García (for Encarnación Redondo Jiménez), María Izquierdo Rojo, Elisabeth Jeggle, Salvador Jové Peres, Hedwig Keppelhoff-Wiechert, Heinz Kindermann, Vincenzo Lavarra, Xaver Mayer, Jan Mulder (for Giovanni Procacci), James Nicholson (for Robert William Sturdy), Neil Parish, Mikko Pesälä, Christa Prets (for António Campos), Agnes Schierhuber, Dominique F.C. Souchet and Eurig Wyn (for Danielle Auroi).

The report was tabled on 23 January 2004.

DRAFT EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on agriculture and agricultural research in the framework of CAP reform (2003/2052(INI))

The European Parliament,

– having regard to Rule 163 of its Rules of Procedure,

– having regard to the report of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development (A5-0018/2004),

A. whereas the European agricultural model of multifunctional and sustainable farming is of great importance for the dynamic development of rural areas in the European Union,

B. whereas agriculture is a dominant factor in the overall ecological and social balance of agricultural landscapes (e.g. climate, soil fertility, biodiversity, abiotic resources and landscape management),

C. mindful of the impact of the agreed reforms to the common agricultural policy, and of the reorientation of agriculture which these reforms will entail,

D. whereas many of the key issues relating to comprehensive sustainability of land use have been neglected until now in favour of increasing production and maximising short-term profit in agriculture, and whereas there is a significant need for research into these issues,

E. whereas a new inter- and transdisciplinary approach to agricultural research could greatly contribute to the integration and acceptance of rural development measures,

F. mindful of the risks associated with agricultural production which is focused solely on rationalisation, and of the public demand for ecologically compatible and multifunctional agriculture which is adapted to regional socio-economic and environmental conditions,

1. Calls on the Commission to make the sustainability of agriculture and rural development a focus of research policy when implementing the sixth framework programme for research and when drawing up its proposal for the seventh framework programme for research;

2. Calls on the Commission to adjust the levels of funding for the various areas of research in order to ensure that a substantial part of the EU research budget for food technology and agricultural research is used for practical research into sustainability and for comparative investigations of different farming systems;

3. Calls on the Commission to treat research into alternative forms of production and sources of income in rural areas as a priority of research policy, to increase it substantially and to assess it from the point of view of sustainability;

4. Believes that research into improving food quality and safety by strengthening links between consumers and producers (the ‘fork-to-farm’ approach) should remain a priority, but that additional research is needed;

5. Expects, in the interests of protecting consumers' health, that the complex interrelationships between nutrition, food quality, actual dietary behaviour and health will be an even greater priority of European research, with greater attention being devoted to the aspect that raw materials for food do not only come from agriculture but have for years increasingly been coming from the production of additives and substitute materials by means of pharmaceutical, synthetic and genetic-engineering processes;

6. Takes the view that a public debate must be held on the purpose of research and the evaluation of findings when granting public funds for research, and calls on the Commission to guarantee public involvement in this debate within expert bodies;

7. Draws attention to the specific role of women in rural development, particularly in the new Member States, where larger numbers of women work in subsistence economies, whether confined to the farm or regional, often subject to the condition that they run the business independently while their husband works elsewhere; calls on the Commission to take appropriate account of this state of affairs in the Union's research activities and to support rural development protagonists with the requisite knowledge;

8. Welcomes the fact that the Commission has acted on Parliament's call for it to commission research into improving marker vaccines for, inter alia, FMD, but stresses that such research must be extended to other List A diseases and that, in view of the development of such diseases, this research constantly remains important;

9. Observes that the costs of scientific research for the purpose of approval of veterinary medicines for less common animal species and active substances and plant protection products for use on crops which are not widely cultivated are sometimes unaffordable for the businesses concerned; calls on the Commission to investigate how a solution can be found to this problem by means of regulation and via the European research budget;

10. Calls for accompanying social and environmental research into the sustainable development of rural areas to be stepped up in view of the enlargement process; as part of this research, scientific investigations should be carried out into practical experience of rural farming and management of natural areas and the knowledge used when developing innovations, whilst at the same time taking account of the demands of local players for fresh ideas from practical scientific findings;

11. Calls in this connection for increased funding of on-farm research, with an emphasis on the diversification of agricultural activity and appropriate farming practices, in particular with regard to breeding;

12. Stresses the need for research into non-food uses of agricultural raw materials, which may contribute not only to sustainability but also to new economic activity in rural areas;

13. Considers that organic farming and other low-input farming methods must be made a specific research priority, as part of which funding should also be provided for research into animal husbandry systems which respect animal welfare;

14. Calls on the Commission to ensure that coexistence measures used in Community-funded biotechnological agricultural research are scientifically monitored;

15. Considers that favourable conditions for biotechnology research should exist in the Union, so that such advanced research can develop successfully in the Union and return to the Union; stresses that biotechnology research is an essential element in the Lisbon strategy and can contribute to high-quality, sustainable agriculture;

16. Calls for increased transparency of Community research funding and a better communication of research findings, both within the scientific community and to agricultural practitioners and rural development players, and believes that the coordination of research activities between the EU, the Member States and regional research institutions must be improved;

17. Calls on the Commission to submit a communication on the future direction, structure and funding of agricultural research in Europe; this communication should also take into account the importance of policy research for the further development of the common agricultural policy;

18. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and Commission.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

European agriculture is linked in a variety of ways with its environment and with the social and economic systems which exist within society. A detailed understanding of these links is necessary in order to develop ideas for sustainable rural development and systems for sustainable land use and production. European agricultural research can contribute to this understanding and, in doing so, strengthen the European model of multifunctional agriculture.

Increased research funding and appropriately targeted research can boost innovation in the field of ecologically compatible farming and sustainable rural development. Priority should be given to improvements in yield security, quality of life and environmental compatibility, whilst taking account of the concerns of farmers and consumers. In order to develop a sustainable farming culture, however, an appropriate culture of agricultural research must also be developed, implemented and funded. Such a culture would make it possible to examine in detail the significance of agriculture both for the development and functioning of rural areas and for the production of food.

Just as research has until now been an important driving force for the intensification and industrialisation of agriculture, in the face of changes in public demand it can and must be a source of innovative ideas for both an environmentally and socially aware agriculture and for consumer protection.

The sixth framework programme for research has a budget of around EUR 16 billion, of which a maximum of 2 % may be allocated to agriculture and rural development. In view of the research which needs to be carried out, this is too low a level of funding for this key primary sector, which in the context of a multifunctional agriculture is responsible for far more than simply producing food, renewable resources and energy crops. A similar situation exists with regard to research policy in the Member States.

The slogan for EU research policy is ‘innovation is the key to added value’. In practice, however, the European Commission has taken innovation to mean the development of new technologies for rationalising food production, and too little attention is paid to the diverse local and traditional knowledge on sustainable use of natural resources available within rural communities. The decline of rural farming and craftsmanship means that this knowledge, which often only exists as practical experience, is lost. The local varieties and species which this locally relevant knowledge has helped introduce are a major source of innovation for the future shaping of multifunctional agriculture in Europe.

The bulk of Community funding is used for research topics which are related to industrialised food processing. Extensive research is carried out into new technologies for food production, processing and packaging, including those involving genetically modified organisms and food preservation by irradiation, although both of these technologies are regarded critically by the majority of EU citizens. EU research funding should not be used to develop acceptance strategies, as this is solely the task of the economic operators wishing to put new technologies on the market.

In contrast, research into sustainable agriculture and organic farming focuses particularly on

the problems of small-scale farming and small and medium-sized processors and retailers. As little research has been carried out in this field to date, a great amount of innovative potential exists. In order to exploit this potential, however, new methodological approaches to sector-oriented research must be introduced. In addition to increased inter- and transdisciplinary cooperation between European researchers, bottom-up approaches need to be integrated into agricultural research.

On-farm research is an indispensable tool not only in developing farming methods which conserve resources, but also in the integration of nature conservation and agriculture, and above all in the sustainable maintenance and use of organic habitats in the agricultural landscape. On-farm research projects increase the practical relevance of solutions, make efficient use of knowledge which is already available in practice but has often remained unrecorded, and speed up the implementation of research findings through the participation of those involved (farmers, nature conservation workers etc.) at an early stage of research, and not only when implementing final results.

Inter- and transdisciplinary research requires individual competence in interdisciplinary cooperation, which is neglected at present in the courses offered at colleges of higher education and universities. In order to safeguard inter- and transdisciplinary research in the long term, the ability to cooperate on an interdisciplinary basis must therefore become an integral part of the teaching curriculum. Additional teaching posts might be created by colleges and universities in order to promote the new approach to teaching and research programmes which this would entail.

Governments must promote research into and the development of ecologically compatible farming in order to ensure that commodities such as ‘healthy nature’, ‘a healthy landscape’ and ‘a healthy environment’ can be produced in the future on a solid economic basis, in addition to the commodity ‘healthy food’. The high degree of public interest in ecologically compatible farming must be reflected in the level of funding, as it is unlikely that third-party funding providers, driven by economic interests alone, will fund this research. The main source of funding for research into and the development of environmentally compatible farming is state aid.