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EU agrarian reform: Agriculture experts demand integration of ecological aspects in agricultural policy

Agriculture Commission at UBA seeks to make consideration of environmental aspects condition of subsidies

Europe's agriculture sector is granted 57 billion euros per year in public funding. Do these subsidies make sense, and where might there be room for improvement in EU subsidies policy? Is environmental protection adequately taken into account in EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)? The Agriculture Commission (KLU) at the Federal Environment Agency believes the opportunity to optimise CAP in 2014-2020 should be seized during the upcoming round of CAP reform talks. "A reform in EU agricultural policy should only subsidise those farmers who provide goods and services for the greater public. This means that the agricultural sector must make greater efforts in future to protect water, climate, air, and biodiversity if they want to continue to receive subsidies", said KLU Chairman Lutz Ribbe.

To achieve this goal, it is of utmost importance that binding requirements concerning the "greening" of agriculture be integrated in the first pillar for farmers who seek to continue to receive direct payments. To this end the KLU proposes:

- Containment of nitrogen inputs,
- Imposing limits on livestock density,
- Sustaining permanent grassland areas,
- Restricting the maximum share of a single crop on farmland, and
- Designating ecologically sensitive areas, that is land that grants priority to wildlife and plants.

Furthermore, extensively used grassland areas (heather and heathland, alpine pastures) should be included in the first pillar subsidy structure. The advantage of this over previous subsidisation practices would be its far-reaching impact compared to the isolated effect(s) up to present.

The KLU believes subsidies for the future second pillar (funding for rural development, as well as agro-environmental measures) must be more focused on achieving set goals and utilised more efficiently to produce goods and services—including more protection of the environment—for the public. They should therefore take into account specific regional circumstances with regard to natural environment and agricultural structure.

To ensure that the success of the currently debated CAP reform can be assessed in a timely fashion, KLU has proposed the institution of six environmental and sustainability goals which Europe's agriculture sector can strive for by 2020. They include: improved resource efficiency, reduction of eutrophication and greenhouse gas emissions, as well as sustaining and boosting biodiversity and soil fertility.

The President of the Federal Environment Agency, Jochen Flasbarth, applauded the Commission's proposals, pronouncing its presented position paper sound and well-founded input for bringing reform to the EU's agricultural subsidisation policies: "Financial support for the farmers in the European Union only makes sense if agricultural production becomes more environmentally friendly and is more respectful of soil, water, air and nature. Subsidies must be justified by notably ecological farming methods", said Flasbarth.

Agriculture Commission at the Federal Environment Agency (KLU):

KLU is a nine-member team of independent expert advisors to UBA. Its chairman is Mr Lutz Ribbe, Director of the Conservation Policy Division at EURONATUR. The KLU office at the Federal Environment Agency is part of Section II 2.8 Soil Use and Cultivation, Agriculture

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More information (in German) about KLU at:

<http://www.umweltbundesamt.de/landwirtschaft/klu/index.htm>

The latest KLU policy brief, Für eine ökologische erste und eine effiziente zweite Säule (in German) is here: <http://www.uba.de/uba-info-medien-e/3981.html>

Dessau-Roßlau, 1 August 2011