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The effects of the implementation of EU agro-environmental policies in Sicily

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Contribution appeared in Sylvander, B., Barjolle, D. and Arfini, F. (1999) (Eds.) “The Socio-Economics of Origin Labelled Products: Spatial, Institutional and Co-ordination Aspects”, proceedings of the 67th EAAE Seminar, pp. 379 - 382

October 28-30, 1999

Le Mans, France



**UNIVERSITA' DEGLI
STUDI DI PARMA**

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INTRODUCTION

This paper aims at a better knowledge of the enforcement of EU agro-environmental policies in Sicily. In the last few years, Regulations 2078/92 and 2080/92 have been largely diffused in the agricultural regional context ; a rapid increase of areas and farms justify the attention paid by the European policies.

The analysis refers to the effects of the enforcement of Regulations 2078/92 and 2080/92 in the agro-forestry system in Sicily between 1994 and 1997.

REGIONAL AGRICULTURAL FRAMEWORK

In Sicily the agricultural sector continues to play an important role, for both the formation of regional GDP (about 8%) and employment (about 14% of the total workforce).

The Sicilian agricultural system is essentially characterised by a limited number of sectors. In the formation of total saleable production, the citrus growing, viticulture, and olive growing sectors account for about 50%, while cereals, livestock breeding and horticulture for an additional 40%.

The Sicilian territory concentrates on crops with high economic returns such as citrus growing, viticulture and horticulture in coastal and irrigated areas, while crops such as olive growing, cereals are concentrated in more inland extensive areas.

Large areas of the highland are characterised by other crops ; for instance dried fruit, which are limited in production and marketability, but are extremely important as a protective land system and also as an enrichment for the landscape.

As far as the forestry sector is concerned in the last few years, the wooded area has got larger with a positive impact from both a social and environmental standpoint.

At present the Sicilian wooded area, which is still below the national average, accounts for about 320000 ha in which about 50% is under environmental protection.

In general, Sicilian woods have low economic returns and therefore limited marketability.

AGRO-ENVIRONMENTAL MEASURES

The application of Regulation 2078/92 in Sicily has taken place over many different stages. Initially in April 1994, only A2 measure was activated (introduction or maintenance of organic agriculture) while, over the following years, another seven measures were activated.

In 1998, two other measures were also activated ; D2, which relates to endangered species and G which relates to public roles and recreational activities.

All the farms in the regional territory are allowed to take part in the programme, among them priority for financial support is given to the farms which are located in areas of relevant environmental interest.

Farms with an area less than 0,5 hectare can not apply for the programme. With regard to measures A2 and E, farms must have an area respectively of at least 1 or 2 hectares.

The amount of the grants are determined taking into account the last income which is the results of the adjustment of the production system required by the agro-environmental plan.

Each farm can apply for a maximum of 30000 ECU and 200000 if the farm is part of an association.

Regulation 2080/92, which determines funding for afforestation in the agricultural sector, has been applied since July 1993. Intervention planned refers to afforestation of about 74000 hectares of land and the improvement of 157000 hectares of existing woods making a total of a little over of 230000.

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF REGULATIONS IN SICILY

The objective of Regulation 2078/92 is to support "eco-compatible" agriculture using fewer pesticides and fertilisers and to encourage other production methods and techniques, which favour the conservation of the natural environment.

The objective of Regulation 2080/92 is to introduce a programme for afforesting land withdrawn from production. It codifies and re-formulates, in a single regulation, a series of measures, which were implemented previously through EEC Regulation 1272/88 (five-year set-aside) and 1609/89 (introduction of forestry measures on agricultural land).

Structural analysis of the agro-environmental policies has shown that their development does not only depend on European financial support. Farmers have also understood how important is to increase these measures for the quality of life and to improve their incomes.

Regulation 2078/92

The first four-year period in which those measures of 2078/92 were applied (1994-97) were a success for Sicily, since the Sicilian Region has used all EU grants and was able to apply and use additional grants which were not taken by other Italian regions (which totalled up to 75% over budgeted grant).

In 1997, up to 27000 farms were involved in the programme, with an area of 158000 hectares (10% of Sicilian Used Agricultural Land).

In 1998, both farms and land extension have increased respectively 29000 and 170000 hectares.

In 1997, the regional programme spent 151 billion lire (more than double what was originally budgeted by the programme for the year). Moreover, 40% of total spending was invested in the organic agriculture measure and 29% was invested on the reduction of phytosanitary products.

To get a picture of the crops and farms typology mostly involved in the programme, not definitive and partial data, furnished by the Agriculture and Forest Assessorship of the Sicilian Region, were used. From such a data, we assume that permanent crops were widely used with 61% of total area.

It is also important to remember that, based on the last Agricultural Census, UAL for permanent crops in Sicily is equal to 30% of the total. Of the permanent crops in the island, 30% are citrus and fruits crops, while among arable lands most predominant are cereals.

Farms, which are currently receiving EU grants have an average dimension of about 9 hectares and are getting a contribution which averages 2800 ECU.

The average dimension of a farm varies based on the measures apply going from an average of 14 hectares for the E measure to 2.5 ha for the B2 measure. Despite the fact most of the farms are of small dimension (30% between 2 and 5 ha of UAL), it is most significant the increase of farms with larger dimension which are now involved in Regulation 2078/92 setting a dramatic change over the past.

The farmers involved in the programme are mostly elderly with an average of 65 years of age, while only 90% of the farmers are under 45 years of age. The data apparently indicates that most farms in Sicily are run by elderly people and only a small percentage by young farmers with less than 35 years of age.

In comparing these data with the ones supplied by the Agricultural Census, it seems that young farmers are mostly interested and more open to accept eco-compatible practices in managing their own farms. Moreover, we can say that farms run by farmers less

than 25 years of age are devoting almost entirely their farms into agro-environmental programme, while elderly farmers are reluctant to do so.

A2 measures – Introduction and maintenance of organic agriculture

In 1997, the A2 measure was financed with more than 61 billion lire becoming the most applied measure during the four-year period (1994-97). 5508 farms received EU grants with a total of 64000 hectares included in the pro-programme. Data available indicates that in 1997 field crops were the most financially supported ; 29% of total area financed was invested in

forage crops, 20% in cereals (most of it hard wheat). Tree crops were also represented with a predominant of citrus and fruit crops (13% each).

A reason, which has prevented so far the measure from spreading, is the difficult of farmers in paying for certification long before they receive the funds.

It is interesting to notice that not all the farms, which have been recognised as "organic" (according to 2092/91 Regulation) benefit by the 2078/92 Regulation financings.

The astension to the programme are quite numerous and concern about the 30% of the total of farms.

Table 1 : Implementation of 2078/92 measures in 1997

Measure	Farms no.	Area hectares	% on total 2078	Sum paid	
				million of lire	in % of total 2078
A1 - Phyto-farmaceuticals reduction	10,773	50,165	29.85	44,047	29.21
A2 - Organic agriculture	6,552	66,853	39.78	61,064	40.50
B1 - Extensivization	2,122	19,652	11.90	11,495	7.62
B2 - Maintenance of low yields	5,386	14,274	8.49	12,890	8.55
D1 - Take care of environment and landscape	1,635	4,417	2.62	5,290	3.50
E - Abandoned land	290	4,417	2.62	2,710	1.79
F - Twenty year set-aside	589	4,498	2.67	6,428	4.26
D1+A1	1,278	2,943	1.75	5,793	3.84
D1+B	287	852	0.50	1,041	0.69
Total	28,912	168,071	100.0	150,758	100.0

Source: Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of Sicilian Region

Regulation 2080/92

As already mentioned, the financial forecast drawn up by the Sicilian Region for early period of implementation was far higher than the amounts actually assigned.

This has strongly contributed to diminish the importance of the intervention, but it is also worth noting that, out of the many applications for funds, only few have been accepted. Furthermore, the very few projects so far approved have dealt with very small areas and costs.

The number of applications sent in 1997 (the last year of the period) was equal to 3667, 72,3% regarding new afforestations and the remaining 27,7% the improvement of pre-existing forest areas.

Only the 31% of the presented applications have been approved (35,8% regarding new afforestation and 24,6% the improvement of pre-existing forest areas). As to areas, they amount to about 17000 hectares, for a total of about 400 approved projects corresponding to 5800 ha.

Table 2 : Implementation of the Regulation 2080/92 in Sicily

AFFORESTATION

Year	Application presented			Application admitted			Application approved		
	no.	Hectares	Million of lire	no.	Hectares	Million of lire	no.	Hectares	Million of lire
1994	634	9,610	81,218	159	2,023	13,108	105	1,281	8,695
1995	748	11,353	86,383	169	1,992	13,743	109	1,164	8,401
1996	509	7,672	66,485	274	3,172	23,952	29	428	3,077
1997	761	9,816	89,678	285	3,778	27,556	60	925	6,582
Total	2,652	38,451	323,764	887	10,965	78,359	303	3,798	26,755

IMPROVEMENT

Year	Application presented			Application admitted			Application approved		
	no.	Hectares	million of lire	no.	Hectares	million of lire	no.	Hectares	million of lire
1994	247	2,274	11,246	28	900	2,703	23	604	2,096
1995	281	2,831	15,720	63	1,717	4,143	47	950	1,857
1996	264	2,621	9,734	68	1,651	5,372	7	105	338
1997	223	7,942	30,782	91	2,510	7,460	18	383	1,189
Total	1,015	15,668	67,482	250	6,778	19,678	95	2,042	5,480

TOTAL

Year	Application presented			Application admitted			Application approved		
	no.	Hectares	million of lire	no.	Hectares	million of lire	no.	Hectares	million of lire
1994	881	11,884	92,464	187	2,923	15,811	128	1,885	10,791
1995	1,029	14,184	102,103	232	3,709	17,886	156	2,094	10,258
1996	773	10,293	76,219	342	4,823	29,324	36	533	3,415
1997	984	17,758	120,460	376	6,288	35,016	78	1,308	7,771
Total	3,667	54,119	391,246	1,137	17,743	98,037	398	5,820	32,235