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Centre for Agricultural Strategy

# Crisis on the family farm: ethics or economics?

Edited by S P Carruthers & F A Miller

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# Small family farms in Europe

Nico Verhagen

## INTRODUCTION

First, I want to thank the SFA and the Centre for Agricultural Strategy for inviting the Coordination Paysanne Européenne (CPE) to this conference. Before addressing the conference theme I would like to say something about the CPE.

It was founded in the early 1980s, when farmers' organisations from different European countries met annually to discuss the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Currently it comprises 16 farmers' organisations from 10 European countries. The CPE is recognised by the EEC and its position in Brussels is becoming stronger due to the active participation of its member organisations and the fact that it continues to expand.

## THE CURRENT SITUATION REGARDING AGRICULTURE IN EUROPE

Agriculture throughout Europe is criticised as causing a number of problems:

- (i) overproduction and dumping on world-markets;
- (ii) scandals concerning the quality of agricultural products;
- (iii) pollution of soils and drinking water;
- (iv) destruction of the landscape.

But what is the cause of all these problems? For example, in the EEC only 6% of the farms produce 60% of all cereals and 1% of all farms own 40% of all farm animals. They are responsible for the overproduction! CPE thinks that it is not at all in the interest of the great majority of farms to dump surpluses on the world-market!

More and more problems will appear concerning the quality of agricultural products. If there is an enormous *Salmonella* problem in the poultry sector, is this not due to the industrial and highly concentrated way of production in this sector?

And who is creating enormous environmental problems? Isn't it intensive, industrialised farming that is using more and more feedstuffs imported from outside Europe like cassava, soyabeans and corn gluten feed? At this moment over 50 million tonnes of feedstuffs are imported into the EEC! In several regions like the Netherlands, Brittany and North Germany this concentration of production creates enormous surpluses of manure that pollute our soils and drinking water for the next generations.

And who is destroying the landscape? Is it not the industrial model of agricultural production that is shaping the landscape more and more according to its needs?

Will the reformed CAP of May 1992 change anything? The very strong pressure from the big cereal producers and intensive cattle rearers managed to overturn the few positive elements in the July 1991 EC proposal in favour of small farms and extensive breeding: 80% of EEC public expenditure will still go to 20% of the biggest and richest farmers. Is it correct that a landowner with 2000, 3000 or even 5000 acres receives full payment for every acre, up to £125 000 a year? The decrease in cereal prices will support even more intensive livestock production and there is even a premium for fodder-maize - a premium for intensification!

CAP reform does not favour the great majority of farms and does not favour the environment as some ministers like to put forward in the public debate.

In general, the CAP is to a great extent responsible for existing social, environmental and other problems. The consumer currently pays twice for his food: first, when he buys the food, secondly as taxpayer to cover all the costs of this intensive agriculture (export refunds 10 000 M ECU), storage of surpluses (5000 M ECU), cleaning of polluted water, costs of rural unemployment, etc.

## THE ROLE OF FARMING IN EUROPE

CPE considers that there is a very important role for the large majority of European farms. This role is unfortunately not yet recognised by many policy makers in the UK and in Brussels who continue to support the industrial way of farming that serves the interests of a small minority (the biggest farms and agro-industry) who want agricultural products to be as cheap as possible in order to enlarge their profits by selling at the same price.

Family-farming plays a crucial role in the rural economy - it is the foundation of rural development. This is true not only for many southern regions of Europe like Portugal or Galicia where 20-40% of the active population is still working in agriculture, but also in Northern Europe, for example here in the UK. Family farms are the key-sector in many regions throughout Europe in maintaining the rural economy and guaranteeing a socially acceptable way of life for the people in those regions.

In other countries of Europe, CPE member organisations are aiming for another model of agriculture based on the vast majority of the farms. (Just for information 90% of farms in Europe are of under 100 acres). CPE wants to maintain the large majority of the farms through ensuring they receive fair payment for their production, to maintain and strengthen production linked to the soil that respects the environment, and to produce good quality food for the consumers in their region.

In Wallonia, Belgian farmers set up their own cooperative to sell quality food directly to consumers. In Basque country farmers are defending local products like the Idiazabal cheese in order to strengthen their position. In Galicia, Spain, thousands of farmers of the Sindicato Labrego Gallego have protested against the reduction of their dairy production by a quota system. In France the Confédération Paysanne is actively promoting another model of agriculture.

Many consumer, environmental, Third World and animal welfare organisations share our ideas on agriculture. More and more they are working together with farmers' organisations of the CPE in alliances like the SAFE-alliance in the UK. Alliances already exist in 6 countries. This is an important sign that all over Europe more and more people see the important role to be played by family farms and the huge costs of industrial farming - environmental damage, unemployment, the destruction of rural economies, bad quality food, etc.

## CONCLUSION

In order to maintain and support an agriculture that offers a future to the people working in it, that really meets the demands of society in the form of good food and sustainability, the CAP has to be reformed in a very profound way. CPE is requesting another reform that should include the following elements:

- (i) to pay farmers for their work through the price of their products - an EEC basic price according to the production costs for a sustainable way of production, and a price complement, linked to production, but limited to a certain volume of production per farm;
- (ii) to actively attack over-intensification in order to respect the environment;

- (iii) no more public money for export refunds. The biggest farms should finance their own exports to world markets;
- (iv) to control production through extensification;
- (v) to support balanced rural development by supporting local processing and regional marketing.



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