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STRUCTURAL POLICY UNDER THE CAP

AN OVERVIEW

by

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APPRAISAL OF THE FACTORS WHICH INFLUENCE THE EVOLUTION OF AGRICULTURAL STRUCTURES IN THE COMMUNITY AND CONTRIBUTE TO THE EFFICIENCY OF THE COMMON AGRICULTURAL (STRUCTURAL) POLICY AT THE REGIONAL AND FARM LEVEL

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PREFACE

Professor Michael Tracy is the author of a highly regarded standard work on European agricultural policy - "Agriculture in Western Europe. Challenge and Responses 1880 - 1980" (Second Edition. Granada, London 1982). Until 1983 he was Director in the Secretariat of the Council of the European Communities. He has lectured on agricultural policy at the College of Europe at Bruges, and is currently Visiting Professor at Wye College, (London University) and at the European Institute of Public Administration in Maastricht.

In 1983 the Arkleton Trust held an international seminar on part-time farming in the rural development of industrialised countries. As a result of that study a research group was formed to promote the idea of a longitudinal study into structural change and multiple job holding amongst Europe's farm households. In September, 1986, the Commission of the European Communities decided to provide major funding support for that part of this research which was to be undertaken within 9 EEC countries. This research programme will involve some 300 farm households in each of 20 study areas covering the range of environmental, agronomic, structural, political, economic and social conditions found in EEC Europe today. There will be a particular interest in the less favoured areas.

The Trust requested an overview of the EEC policy context within which this research programme was set, and we were happy indeed that Michael Tracy agreed to provide this overview for a meeting of the project's Steering Group held in Brussels in September, 1986. The paper was not originally intended for publication, but as a contribution to the development of "context studies" to be undertaken in each study area and to suggest directions in which the survey work might usefully be pointed, bearing in mind its emphasis on both multiple job holding and the more general analysis of structural change. It has however seemed to the Trust that it would be useful to make this paper more widely available.

This is the first in a series of occasional publications by the Arkleton Trust (Research) Ltd., which is responsible for managing and co-ordinating the European research programme. These occasional papers are intended to bring to a much wider audience the various working papers which will be produced during the research programme.

John Bryden, November, 1986.

1. THE ECONOMIC CONTEXT

In Western Europe generally, the period since the end of the Second World War has been characterised by the following major development in agriculture:

- Growth in output per man and per unit of land, resulting from technological innovation and its progressive adoption on farms
- Reduction in the hired labour force, and substitution of capital and current inputs
- Reduction in the number of farms, with enlargement of those that remain

These developments have not however produced as big a growth in incomes per farm as might have been expected, because output has outstripped consumption in Western Europe, with a resulting squeeze on prices in relation to costs. Further, since the economic recession following the first oil crisis in 1973, the rate of outflow of labour from agriculture to other sectors has slowed down considerably. As a result of these combined factors, average net value added per person working in agriculture in the countries of the European Community now appears to be little or no higher (in real terms) than some ten years ago, while the net income per person of farm families from farming activities has substantially deteriorated. Average real incomes in other sectors have risen, though less fast than in earlier periods, so the farming sector appears, as a whole, to have fallen farther behind.¹

To some extent, unfavourable trends in income from farming must have been offset by increased earnings by farm families from off-farm sources. It is estimated that one-third of farmers in the Community (of ten) have paid activities off their farms, and many members of farm families, in some regions, likewise have part-time or full-time non-farm jobs which add to the family income. The amount of such earnings, however, is known only where estimates can be made from surveys in specific areas.

This description of macro-economic trends is no more than a gloss on information contained in the annual "Agricultural Situation in the Community" and other Commission reports. Such generalisation remains unsatisfactory in several respects.

In the first place, the various regions of the Community have undergone significantly different developments. Regional disparities may initially have been increased as the already prosperous farming regions took advantage of CAP market support, and also underwent rapid structural change, benefitting from general economic growth in or near such regions. More recently, with economic recession slowing down structural change, with the growing squeeze on farming profits, and with a reinforcement of aids for "southern" products previously comparatively unsupported, disparities may have ceased to widen. Nevertheless, they remain very great.²

In the second place, data on average agricultural incomes such as those referred to above conceal wide variations between farm types. Some farms, in particular specialised crop farms, located in well-favoured regions, and starting from a position

¹ Cf. Green Europe Newsflash no.23

² Cf. European Parliament 1985

of strength with substantial enterprises, appear to have done relatively well. Others, especially mixed farms, small farms, and farms in less-favoured regions, have done less well.³

Even within such broad classifications, different farm families have probably reacted in quite different ways to the problems and opportunities facing them. Some have been able to expand their farming enterprises; others have stagnated or gone out of farming; some have complemented their incomes by off-farm work.

There is in fact little knowledge as to the determinants of individual responses, and this is a serious handicap in the formulation of effective policy measures. This point will be further developed below, but first it is necessary to consider which policy measures are now significant.

³ Cf. Green Europe Newsflash no. 32

2. THE POLICY CONTEXT

With supply of foodstuffs in Western Europe rising faster than demand, imports have been reduced or virtually eliminated and exports increased, while stocks have accumulated. In these circumstances the cost of supporting farm prices has increased, to become in the European Community a major political issue. At the same time, the farming community remains dissatisfied with the trend in farm incomes and demands increased support.

Third countries which traditionally were major food exporters to Western Europe have seen their markets in the region diminish, and increasingly meet subsidised competition from Community exports on world markets. The risk of trade war with such countries has become, together with the budget constraint, another major obstacle to increased price support under the Common Agricultural Policy.

Faced with these conflicting priorities, adjustments have been made to the CAP, as regards both price policy and structural policy.

a. Price Policy

Price support continues to be given to Community farmers mainly by means of intervention at specified prices on markets within Member States, while the internal price is held above world prices by the import levy system, and exports are subsidised by the so-called "export refunds". For some commodities - e.g. durum wheat, olive oil - protection is limited to fairly low customs duties and support is given to producers by aids to producers and/or processors. A major exception to the system of support and protection exists as regards "cereal substitutes (manioc, maize gluten feed, etc.) and oil seeds (especially soya), where tariffs were "bound" in GATT negotiations early in the Community's history at low or zero levels.

While this basic apparatus has been maintained, the pressures referred to above have had the following two major consequences:

- (i) In recent years, common prices have been increased much less than inflation, or have even been somewhat decreased (for some products) in the last two years.

However, resistance to overt price decreases has proved strong, as demonstrated by the German "veto" on a cut in cereal prices in 1985 (this cut was nevertheless implemented by the Commission). In 1986, no explicit cut in cereal target prices was made, but a "co-responsibility levy" was introduced, at the rate of 3%, while changes in the intervention system and in quality standards also have the effect of lowering returns to producers.

It should be added, however, that restraint in fixing common prices has been partially negated by "agri-monetary" changes which have had the net effect of raising prices in national currencies.

For several products, "guarantee thresholds" are in operation, which provide that if output exceeds a certain amount, the support price (or aid, as the case may be) will be reduced. Production of the commodities concerned has generally hit these thresholds.

- (ii) For certain products, the guarantee of support has been made subject to quantitative limits. The sugar regime has always been based upon a quota system (though it is arguable that this has not so much held back production as maintained the crop in areas not well suited to it). A quota system for milk is now in its third year of operation: farmers (and dairies) who exceed their quotas are liable to pay a "supplementary levy" (in addition to the basic co-responsibility levy still in force for milk), which in principle is set at a prohibitive level. It is currently proving difficult to enforce the payment of levy in certain regions, and numerous administrative problems have arisen.

The scheme initially reduced milk production in the Community, but surpluses of butter and skim milk powder continue to mount. A scheme for "buying-up" quota rights has now been introduced, with Community finance for an amount equivalent to 3% of quotas, and the total of quotas is to be reduced by 2% on 1 April, 1987, and a further 1% a year later.

It remains to be seen whether the quota system can solve the surplus problem in the dairy sector, and there are fundamental issues as to its long-term structural effects.⁴

b. Structural Policy

The common structural policy meanwhile has likewise undergone significant changes. Those measures which were originally conceived as being of general application throughout the Community have been altered almost out of recognition, while numerous and in some cases important measures have been adopted for specific regions.⁵

(i) Measures of general application

The original "Mansholtian" concept of promoting "viable" large-scale farms has been progressively abandoned. Several factors have contributed to this change. In the first place, the "basic" directives of 1972 did not achieve their aim. Very little use was made of Directive 72/160 (the "outgoers" scheme), and in so far as some land was released under the scheme, little of it went to the farmers who had submitted modernisation plans under Directive 72/159. Consequently, modernisation on these farms took the form largely of intensification on the existing area. The Commission has frequently stressed that this brings the scheme into conflict with the increasingly important aim of holding down supply.

⁴ Since this paper was delivered, the Commission has proposed additional reductions in the total amount of quotas, and tightening-up the system in various other ways.

⁵ A general account of the results of the various structural measures is given by the Commission in its annual "Agricultural Situation in the Community" - see in particular Chapter VI in the 1985 report (published early 1986). Financial data appear in the annual report on the FEOGA Guidance Section. No more detailed analysis is published at the Community level: in recent years the Commission ceased to produce the annual report on the implementation of the basic directives which was required under Directive 72/159 (Article 22). It should be noted that Member States have not insisted on the Commission fulfilling this obligation ...

Another criticism which was increasingly levelled by some Member States at the basic directives, Directive 72/159 in particular, related to the selective principle which from the start had governed this scheme. In particular, the "comparable income" criterion necessary to obtain investment aids excluded -as it was meant to do -the majority of small farms. Justifiable in a context of economic growth and expanding employment opportunities, this approach seemed increasingly over-restrictive in a situation where employment opportunities off the farm were limited, and where there was increasing concern at the need to maintain rural communities, particularly in less-favoured areas. Further, in Italy and in the new Mediterranean Member States, the proportion of farms which could meet these criteria was particularly limited.

In 1985 the basic directives were replaced by Regulation 797/85, under which investment aids can be provided to practically any low-income farmer who puts forward an improvement plan: the lower limit of eligibility has disappeared, and instead there is an upper limit in that the improvement plan should not raise income above 120 % of a "reference income"! Further, a stronger link with market policy is in principle provided by stipulations to the effect that the investments should improve quality and adjust production in line with market requirements, or should reduce costs; protection of the environment is also an eligible type of investment. There seems so far to be no information at the Community level as to experience in implementing these provisions.⁶

In April 1986 the Commission put forward a new set of proposals (document COM(86)199 final). The measures proposed include a "pre-pension" scheme, which would differ from the unsuccessful Directive 72/160 in that there is no longer any provision for the land released to go to "development farms": the land can be taken out of production, or can be given to a son (or daughter). It is also proposed to give aid to young farmers additional to that already provided under Regulation 797/85; to reinforce the compensatory allowance in less-favoured areas; to provide Community aids for practices favourable to the rural environment; to promote agricultural training and advisory services; to promote the afforestation of farmland; and to adjust the research programme in line with current needs. These proposals are currently before the Council.

In its "Green Paper" of 1985, the Commission appeared to envisage a fundamental re-orientation of the support system, with direct income aids offsetting substantial price reductions. In view of the difficulty in getting producer support or Council agreement for such a course, the Commission backed away from it. It has not proposed a system of direct aids as such: the measures just referred to, however, are said to aim at alleviating farm incomes.

(ii) Regionalised measures

The "less-favoured areas" Directive, no. 75/268, was the first measure in favour of specified regions: it remains essentially a social instrument rather than a means of structural adjustment, its main feature being the provision of compensatory allowances to farmers in the designated areas.

⁶ For a general description of Regulation 797/85, see Green Europe no. 211

From 1978 onwards, a series of measures was adopted in favour of Mediterranean regions in particular, though some regions in other Member States, particularly Ireland, also obtained programmes in their favour. The list included irrigation (drainage in the case of Ireland), infrastructure improvement, afforestation, inshore fisheries and other items. On the accession of Greece in 1981, similar measures were extended to this country, followed in 1982 by a more general programme to accelerate agricultural development. A scheme for accelerated agricultural development has now been introduced for Portugal.

In 1981, three experimental "integrated" programmes were adopted, intended to promote development covering various sectors besides agriculture, in the Western Isles of Scotland, the Lozere in France, and South-East Belgium.

As with the measures of general application, information at the Community level on the implementation of these various regionalised measures is scanty and superficial. "The Agricultural Situation" report and the annual FEOGA report do not provide any analysis of the effectiveness of the schemes other than in terms of whether allocated funds have been taken up or not. Except where relatively detailed reports have been made at the regional level (as in the case of the Western Isles project), there is little or no information as to the impact of the money spent.

Indeed, many of these regionalised schemes responded above all to a political need, with little prior analysis of the economic requirements of the region and little consultation at the regional level. Some such schemes were even hastily concocted as make-weights in the context of annual price reviews, to enable particular Ministers to subscribe to a package agreement: it was in this way that several of the measures for Italy and for Ireland came to be adopted, and the concessions given to Germany in the 1986 price review allowing this country to expand its list of less-favoured areas (subsequently used to extend the coverage from four to six million hectares!) is only the latest in a lengthy list.

The decision to introduce the Integrated Mediterranean Programmes was even more political in nature. The concept of ambitious programmes of this nature was initially put forward by the Commission in 1983 (as a counter-balance to measures to solve the UK budget problem), despite the lack of experience with the experimental schemes adopted in 1981: it was seized upon by the new Greek government under Papandreou as a means of obtaining a significant advantage from Community membership, and eventually conceded with reduced but still substantial financial commitments –as the price for Greek agreement to the accession of Spain and Portugal. As the aim of these programmes is to help the southern regions of the Community of Ten to face up to Spanish competition, they are being implemented in Greece, Italy and France, but not in the two newest Member States. The regional programmes are currently in various stages of preparation.

Thus, in the regionalised measures, the "common" structural policy has become to a large extent a means for budgetary redistribution between the Member States. This is not to say that the measures in question are not potentially helpful. Considering the large amounts of money involved, however, the information available on the effectiveness of these schemes is remarkably limited, and generally does not permit any valid assessment.

c. Current Dilemmas

The debate over "reform of the CAP" is by no means concluded. The Commission's "Green Paper" of July 1985 was only one of a long series of attempts to produce reform proposals, and it is unlikely to be the last (it was in any case followed in December 1985 by a less-publicised document optimistically entitled "A Future for European Agriculture", which represented in some significant respects a back-tracking from the Green Paper).

The Green Paper was intended to stimulate a wide-ranging debate. Though officially the Commission appears to have already drawn its conclusions, that debate will continue, but already the subject matter has moved on. The CAP is now faced with apparently insuperable dilemmas:

- The cost of market support continues to soar. The fall in the dollar/ECU rate, which pushes up the cost of export "refunds", is largely blamed, but it would be more correct to admit that CAP costs were fortunately held down in recent years by an abnormally high dollar, to which there is little likelihood of return.
- Surplus stocks of butter, skim milk powder and beef are at high or record levels, in spite of heavy expenditure on disposal, and cereal stocks seem likely to grow: further expenditure seems inevitable, but it is becoming questionable whether any outlet can be found for some of the produce in store or for the extra production that is to be expected in coming years.
- The rise in expenditure on CAP market support has pushed total budget expenditure right up to the new "ceiling" of 1.4 % of the VAT base already in the first year of operation of this new ceiling. A revised 1986 budget could be put through in July only by shifting funds from FEOGA Guidance to Guarantee, and by reducing appropriations for overseas aid and other items. Appropriations for FEOGA Guarantee will certainly still fall short of needs in 1986.
- The milk quotas need to be further reduced, yet the system is already coming under increased pressure as many dairies and/or producers find themselves for the first time liable to pay the "super levy". It is becoming questionable whether the penalties can be enforced in any equitable and acceptable way.
- The cereals co-responsibility levy, which came into force on 1 July, 1986, is raising numerous administrative problems. It is moreover unlikely that it will be effective in cutting output. Very soon a new debate will begin as to what else can be done in the cereals sector: price cuts? quotas? "set-aside" ... ?
- The intervention system for beef has come under excessive strain, but the Member States cannot agree to reform it.
- The Mediterranean Member States, now four in number, have different priorities from the northern Member States, and to some extent from each other. They probably concur in wanting to keep down expenditure on market support for "northern" products, while reinforcing support and protection for "southern" products. In general, they want more funds for structural measures.

However, Spain and Portugal are not eligible for the ambitious "Integrated Mediterranean Programmes" from which Greece, Italy and France benefit.

- Some Ministers of Agriculture seem to have less and less hesitation in promising their farmers compensation at the national level for inadequate support under Common Market regimes. Consequently, national aids appear increasingly to proliferate, and in ways which appear increasingly dubious as regards their compatibility with the Community principle that national aids should not give producers in one Member State an advantage over those in other Member States. "Re-nationalisation" of the CAP has become a risk that must be taken seriously.
- To all this one might add that there is latent conflict within the new structural policy, which may come to a head in the debate over the new structural proposals. What is this policy really aiming at? Can it be described as a structural policy any longer? Are there ways in which measures to improve incomes on individual farms, or in specified regions, can be reconciled with the imperative of curbing surplus production? If not, do we move towards a purely social policy of income payments in one form or another? But then, do we not -particularly through measures such as aids to young farmers merely perpetuate the problem?

3. QUESTIONS FOR STUDY

It was pointed out in section 1 that there is insufficient understanding of the micro-economic forces which cumulatively produce observable macro-economic trends. In consequence, policy formulation frequently lacks knowledge as to the likely effects of alternative measures. It would be most valuable to have, for instance, better understanding as to how far major "strategic" decisions by farm families are influenced by their expectations as regards prices and costs? By the availability of investment aids, or of compensatory allowances, or of outgoers' premia? by the existence or non-existence in their region, or further afield, of non-farm job opportunities? Are any of these factors as powerful as motivations relating to the family structure itself? by, for example, the need to provide for a growing young family, or on the contrary by age or ill-health on the part of the farmer?

Specific questions for study might include the following:

- To what extent may a recovery in economic activity (spurred by the fall in oil prices and reduced inflation and interest rates) cause a renewed acceleration in structural change in agriculture? Seen globally, there is such a large pool of unemployment that there appears to be little promise of substantial uptake of farm labour: but what sort of employment, in which places, is likely to attract labour off farms, and is that type of activity likely to develop or can it be encouraged? What sort of education and training of farm youth might contribute to this process?
- What measures of agricultural policy have the greatest influence on strategic decision-making by the farm family? In particular:
 - Is a price cut likely to cause reduced production, and if so, in what way? -or is it true, as is often said, that the reaction of individual farmers is to increase output to maintain their incomes? If the latter, how long are they likely to keep this up? Does the annual announcement of price supports have a significant effect? Would an announcement covering several years ahead be more effective? Do farm families in fact react more to a general "feeling" as to prospects in the years ahead? Do national aids in some Member States offset the effects of restrictive price policy at the Community level?
 - Do investment aids significantly influence decisions to expand and/or modernise? How, in particular, are the new provisions under Regulation 797/85 being implemented?
 - How big do outgoers/premia have to be in order to produce results? Do they simply accelerate passage of the farm to a successor?
 - In less-favoured areas, does the compensatory allowance constitute a major factor in maintaining people on the farm?
 - In regions where special schemes have been in operation (irrigation, infrastructure, etc.), what effect have these had at the level of individual farms? What impact has been made in rural areas by the Regional and Social Funds?
- Questions related more specifically to multiple job-holding might include:
 - Where farm families engage in multiple job-holding, does the intensity of the farming operation tend to diminish? If so, what kind of non-farming activities tend particularly to produce this result?

- Are new forms of multiple job-holding tending to emerge? e.g. activities related to recreation or countryside conservation, or jobs in high-technology sectors such as electronics?

The study to be undertaken by the Arkleton Trust seems to provide an opportunity to throw light on a broad range of questions, and not only on those related specifically to multiple job-holding.

MAJOR SOURCES AND REFERENCES

Agra-Europe (weekly)

Commission of the European Community:

- The Agricultural Situation in The Community (annual)
- Financial reports on the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund (annual)
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 - Newsflash no. 33, July 1985: "Perspectives for the Common Agricultural Policy"
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