Brussels,
CC D(2006) **41348**
G/B25/DT5/quality grid LFA - final

EVALUATION OF LESS FAVOURED AREA MEASURE

Subject: Quality grid based on the Final Report submitted by IEEP

PRELIMINARY REMARK

The following text and grid provides a global assessment of the above-mentioned evaluation study. The Commission steering group in charge prepared it at the end of the evaluation process.

The judgement is made on the methodological approach followed to answer the evaluation questions, not on the results, conclusions or recommendations reached by the contractor. It has to be pointed out that it is neither the opinion of the evaluators nor the content of their conclusions that are judged here, but only the methods used for obtaining them.

1. Meeting the needs: Does the evaluation adequately address the information needs of the commissioning body and fit the terms of reference?

The evaluation fully fits the Terms of Reference and meets the information needs of the Commission. The question of effectiveness of the LFA measure has been well addressed by looking in detail at the impacts of the measure with respect to the objectives to be achieved. Also the questions of efficiency and relevance were well addressed while taking into account the changes of needs and objectives over the time period.

On the whole, the evaluator delivered fully what was envisaged in the tender dossier and the evaluation questions listed in the Terms of Reference have been addressed.

   Global assessment: good

2. Relevant scope: Is the rationale of the policy examined and its set of outputs, results and outcomes/impacts examined fully, including both intended and unexpected policy interactions and consequences?

The evaluation has fully examined the rationale and results of the LFA measure. The time frame and the different legislations to be addressed were completely taken into account as well as the geographical scope. The questions of outcomes and impacts were addressed being based on a well elaborated intervention logic.

The evaluation identified clearly interactions and interdependencies of the LFA measure with other policies, especially other European agricultural policy measures. In addition the evaluation takes into account the effects of wider contextual factors such as the structural change in European rural areas and its implications for the LFA measure.

Therefore intended and unintended results and impacts of the policy are well identified.

   Global assessment: good

3. Defensible design: Is the evaluation design appropriate and adequate to ensure that the full set of findings, along with methodological limitations, is made accessible for answering the main evaluation questions?

The methodological design is carefully reasoned and clearly presented. The methodology, criteria and indicators have been followed or have been well adapted when data constraints hindered its implementation or when relevant issues needed further investigation. The evaluation might have gained additional reliability by basing theoretical assumptions more on economic theories.

The evaluation team was flexible to adapt the methodology if needed. The design applied is therefore adapted to each evaluation question and the data availability. The methodology for answering the evaluation questions is clearly explained and appropriate.

Global assessment: satisfactory

4. Reliable data: To what extent are the primary and secondary data selected adequate? Are they sufficiently reliable for their intended use?

Multiple ways of data collection were effectively targeted. The size and the sampling techniques for the data collection ensure a good reliability of primary data while also secondary data was well exploited. The data sources are clearly identifiable in the report.

However, for some key aspects of the evaluation, only insufficiently reliable data was available. Especially concerning issues like marginalisation of agricultural land sufficiently reliable data is not available. In addition, the use of FADN and FSS data implicitly includes some restrictions on the reliability of data, as FSS is only fully collected once every ten years and FADN data excludes small farms from the sample. As these data sources established the basis for the evaluation, the reliability of the data is only given to a certain extent. However, as no better data sources exist the approach used was appropriate and the limits of the data sources are clearly stated in the report.

>   Global assessment: good

5. Sound analysis: Is quantitative and qualitative information appropriately and systematically analysed according to the state of the art so that evaluation questions are answered in a valid way?

The analysis of the information presented was good. The quantitative and qualitative information was well used for answering the evaluation questions. The different analytical tools used were appropriate; making use of different quantitative and qualitative tools for analysing the qualitative and quantitative data in a valid manner. However, in some parts, the theory-led economic analysis could have been more elaborated.

The findings were presented in a way that summarised the results while establishing groups of similar cases which facilitated an overall assessment of the different findings. This was especially useful in the case of contradictory or divers findings where the grouping allowed a differentiated assessment of the analysis which facilitated the development of valid answers to the evaluation questions.

>   Global assessment: good

6. Credible findings: Do findings follow logically from, and are they justified by, the data analysis and interpretations based on carefully described assumptions and rationale?

The data sources form a robust basis supporting the findings which are well justified. The reasoning is well explained, the assumptions made and the methodological limitations are carefully described. The findings are carefully expressed, in order to take into account the data constraints and the consequent limitations of the methodology and assumptions.

The evaluator was very conscientious of those instances where the information basis for answering some of the evaluation questions was not robust enough, and tried to avoid any judgements which were not sufficiently founded by the sources exploited.

Global assessment: good

7. Validity of the conclusions: Does the report provide clear conclusions? Are conclusions based on credible results?

Conclusions are laid out in a clearly understandable and detailed manner. The conclusions are based on a sound analysis and credible findings. They are not biased by partisan considerations. Given the data constraints, they are balanced and prudent. The reasoning between the findings and the conclusions is well explained.

Global assessment: good

8. Usefulness of the recommendations: Are recommendations fair, unbiased by personal or stakeholders' views, and sufficiently detailed to be operationally applicable?

The conclusions and recommendations are fair and unbiased. They are well explained, based on the findings of the report and are useful as they are taking into account the ongoing political discussion on the LFA measure. The recommendations do not provide clear policy proposals for the future but identify crucial issues which have to be reconsidered for the future development of the policy.

Global assessment: good

9. Clear report: Does the report clearly describe the policy evaluated, including its context and purpose, together with the procedures and findings of the evaluation, so that information provided can easily be understood?

The report is very well-structured, written in a very clear language and therefore easily understandable.

Overall judgement: excellent

The overall quality rating of the report is considered

good

Concerning these criteria, the evaluation report is:	Unaccep-table	Poor	Satisfac-tory	Good	Excel-lent
1. Meeting the needs: Does the evaluation adequately address the information needs of the commissioning body and fit the terms of reference?				X	
2. Relevant scope: Is the rationale of the policy examined and its set of outputs, results and outcomes/impacts examined fully, including both intended and unexpected policy interactions and consequences?				X	
3. Defensible design: Is the evaluation design appropriate and adequate to ensure that the full set of findings, along with methodological limitations, is made accessible for answering the main evaluation questions?			X		
4. Reliable data: To what extent are the primary and secondary data selected adequate? Are they sufficiently reliable for their intended use?				X	
5. Sound analysis: Is quantitative and qualitative information appropriately and systematically analysed according to the state of the art so that evaluation questions are answered in a valid way?				X	
6. Credible findings: Do findings follow logically from, and are they justified by, the data analysis and interpretations based on carefully described assumptions and rationale?				X	
7. Validity of the conclusions: Does the report provide clear conclusions? Are conclusions based on credible results?				X	
8. Usefulness of the recommendations: Are recommendations fair, unbiased by personal or stakeholders' views, and sufficiently detailed to be operationally applicable?				X	
9. Clearly reported: Does the report clearly describe the policy being evaluated, including its context and purpose, together with the procedures and findings of the evaluation, so that information provided can easily be understood?					X
The overall quality rating of the report is considered				X	