

## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Introduction and description of the information policy on the Common Agricultural Policy

This report provides the European Commission (EC) with an evaluation of the information policy of DG AGRI<sup>1</sup> on the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) within the European Union, from May 2000 to 2005.

The evaluation covers two types of activity:

- **direct actions:** i.e. conferences and seminars, participation in fairs, publications, DG AGRI's website, information visits, audiovisual productions and other direct information actions; and
- **indirect actions:**<sup>2</sup> conferences and seminars, publications, information visits and exchanges, audiovisual productions and other information actions for which the EC provided part-funding.

The rationale of Council Regulation 814/2000, which provides the legal basis and political direction for expenditure on information policy on the CAP, was the belief, in particular, that “the common agricultural policy is often misunderstood because of a dearth of information”, as stated in the Regulation itself.

The overarching objective was: “*to rectify this situation ... through a consistent, objective and comprehensive information and communication strategy.*”

The objectives were to be to:

- help explain, and implement and develop the Common Agricultural Policy;
- promote the European model of agriculture and help people understand it;
- inform farmers and other parties active in rural areas;
- raise public awareness of the issues and objectives of that policy.

The Regulation noted also that the issues surrounding the common agricultural policy and its development should be explained to both farmers and other parties directly concerned, as well as the general public.

The themes or messages for both direct and indirect actions were formulated with the help of inputs from across the DG and from the Commissioner and his/her office, some of which are set out in internal strategy documents.

The objectives of the Regulation in relation to *indirect actions* were expanded or supplemented by objectives/suggestions on key messages found in the annual calls for proposals for these actions.

The total budget allocated for information measures under Regulation 814/2000 in the period 2000-2005 was €37m. However the yearly budgets were significantly underspent, and over the period 2000-2005, only 56% of the budget allocation was actually expended. The limited uptake of the funding possibilities was due principally to underspending of the budget allocated for indirect actions.

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<sup>1</sup> DG Agriculture and Rural Development.

<sup>2</sup> This terminology differs from standard Commission budgetary terminology in which an indirect action is one financed via a Member State.

### **Direct actions**

The organisation of Conferences and the publication of information documents were the key information activities over the period 2000-2005. However, participation at Fairs assumed an increasing importance over that period. Another regular activity was the financing of large surveys.

### **Indirect actions**

During the review of the projects financed between 2000 and 2005, we identified nine types of activity financed within the annual work programmes and specific measures:

1. Conferences/seminars;
2. Publications;
3. Audiovisual/Video/CD-ROMs;
4. Information visits;
5. Exchange programmes;
6. Websites;
7. Stands at fairs;
8. Surveys;
9. Multiple actions.

Conferences and seminars accounted for more than half these activities. Farmers, farm advisors and farmers' associations made up well over half the groups targeted by the indirect actions. The world of agriculture was targeted in some way by the vast majority of activities. The general public, though clearly identified as a target group by calls for proposals constituted only 7% of the immediate target groups of the indirect information actions.

### **Evaluation themes and methodology**

The Commission sought an evaluation on the basis of seven themes (presented below from A to G).

Our evaluation is based on desk research, including access to Commission files, and on perceptions gathered in interviews with EC officials, Member State officials at central and local government level, and stakeholders across the EU-25,. In principle, we interviewed the Ministry responsible for agricultural matters, some farming and rural organisations, the European Commission Representations, European Information Relays and journalists and/or communication experts. We also took into account formal measurements of instrument and programme impact to the extent that these were available.

Several issues had to be taken into account during our evaluation work:

- There was a lack of quantitative data on impact on target publics (as opposed to indicators on numbers reached, for example).
- The survey data from the Eurobarometer was not an adequate baseline measurement in order to define clearly in advance the communication objectives; without this baseline, the effectiveness of a measure cannot be measured against the starting point and original objectives. Even had such data existed, the link between a communication programme and the quantitative impact is very often difficult to establish in a clear and irrefutable manner.
- Collection of qualitative data is a valid tool for evaluation, but when campaigns or activities have ended several years previously, it is not realistic to obtain reliable feedback. This limited our ability to evaluate activities carried out during the first part of the period covered by the evaluation.

## **Results of the evaluation**

Our conclusions by evaluation theme are:

### **A. Effectiveness in targeting the general public**

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#### **CONCLUSIONS**

During the first part of the period under evaluation, there was a heavy emphasis on reaching the farming community. Whereas the Regulation provided a framework for reaching a wider audience, more of an effort to reach the general public was made from 2003 onwards. There was a recognisable increase in professionalism in the approach to supply over this period (i.e. the right message and material were prepared in a generally timely fashion), but there was not sufficient clarity about the needs of the target groups (including for material in all EU languages) and about the corresponding dissemination requirements.

Individual activities were effective, but it cannot be considered that the policy as a whole was effective because the target was too broad and the numbers reached too low by comparison.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

We recommend that DG AGRI:

- develop a clearer strategy on reaching the general public as a primary target, either direct or via relevant stakeholder organisations, paying more attention to the nature of demand and implementation;
- devote a significantly increased budget to reaching the general public.

### **B. Effectiveness in targeting rural area stakeholders**

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#### **CONCLUSIONS**

Individual activities were effective in reaching some members of the overall target group, or the specific target group for a particular event or indirect action. Conferences and some aspects of the website were particularly effective. Participation at Fairs was notably more professional from the middle of the period onwards. However, insufficient attention was paid to distribution, dissemination, translation and suitability for local contexts, to reaching the rural community as a whole rather than such the farming community, to verifying that stakeholder organisations were passing the desired messages on to their members and for learning lessons or disseminating information/best practice from indirect actions. These shortcomings meant that the policy was not effective as a whole.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

We recommend that DG AGRI:

- develop a clearer strategy on reaching farming/rural stakeholders and individual members of the farming/rural community based on a deeper understanding of the needs of these groups, and improvements in implementation;
- create a better balance between activities targeting the farming community and those targeting the rural community in the broadest sense of the word, in order to reflect better the importance of rural development in the European agricultural model.

## **C: Effectiveness in improving the implementation and management of the CAP**

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### **CONCLUSIONS**

Information policy can be used to improve policy implementation and management by:

- building in feedback mechanisms, and
- ensuring that personnel involved in implementation and management of the policy are as well equipped as they can be to carry out their work and to represent the policy to the outside world.

Some forms of information policy, e.g. conferences, did provide one of many channels for feedback on the CAP as a whole. and one that was felt to be working satisfactorily. There is, on the other hand, an unfulfilled need for a mechanism for feedback on information policy to ensure that it results in improvements in implementation and management of the CAP.

The internal communication tools used to ensure that EC staff have the information they need to implement and manage the CAP are relatively effective, but the background material provided could be more effective if it were more up-to-date or more concise.

The effectiveness in obtaining feedback on how information policy can improve the implementation and management of the CAP was limited, but internal communication was broadly effective in communicating with DG AGRI personnel.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

We recommend that DG AGRI:

- define more specifically when, whether and how to use information measures as a source of feedback, and
- investigate further the needs of officials for up-to-date information and clear messages on current policies.

## **D. Effectiveness in mixing information tools and resulting efficiency**

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### **CONCLUSIONS**

Information policy is a tool kit. The issue is less the relative effectiveness of one tool as opposed to another than the mix. The website is by far the most widely used tool, but this does not mean that it could exist in isolation or that those who ranked it as the most useful in our interviews would want to be without the other tools. However, the synergies were not taken into account in any structured fashion in order to maximise effectiveness, thus meaning that it was not possible to evaluate resulting efficiency.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

We recommend that DG AGRI:

- develop its understanding of the synergies between different types of information tool, so that relative effectiveness and resulting efficiency are optimised, using a matrix for taking decisions on which tools should be used as a function of the definition of the target groups and the “communication” objectives to be reached;
- define precisely the target groups, better assess and understand the information needs, develop an overall strategy taking into account the targets, the priorities, the needs, the channels and tools and the available budget, and especially when considering the general public, evaluate whether a

critical mass of communication and information flow can be reached with the available budget, bearing in mind that developing only a few actions because of the limited budget to reach the general public is probably bound to be ineffective.

## **E. Coherence and synergy with other information actions on the CAP**

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### **CONCLUSIONS**

The extent to which the Information Unit within DG Agriculture, which is the main channel for implementation of information policy, exploits synergies with other Commission players varies significantly, but works well with key players, such as the Spokesman's Group. The potential for cooperation with EC Representations, Relays, Member States and stakeholder organisations needs further development.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

We recommend that DG AGRI:

- adopt a more structured approach to co-operation with other actors in the information process, both inside and outside the Commission, including via:
  - regular consultation with Representations, and an annual joint strategy for cooperation with each Representation;
  - a communication strategy targeting rural-based Europe Direct relays based on consultation with this network on the development of publications, in particular for the general public;
  - regular consultations with both Member States and key stakeholder organisations on strategy and key information tools.

## **F. Relevance of the objectives - main targets and communication strategy**

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### **CONCLUSIONS**

For the objectives of an information policy to be relevant, they should meet the needs of the main target groups, in this case the general public and farming/rural stakeholders, and the objectives need to be incorporated in an overall communication strategy. There was, however, limited baseline measurement of the need as Eurobarometer questions were not designed to elicit appropriate information on awareness, knowledge and understanding of the CAP. What information was available was generally not available on a continuous basis..

Our interviews enabled us to identify the major concerns across the EU. Despite national differences related to different patterns of agricultural production and differences in the importance of agriculture to different countries, there is a common range of core subjects on which information is felt to be needed. The Commission's information priorities were relevant to these needs.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

We recommend that DG AGRI:

- put in place a system to measure awareness, knowledge and understanding, and changes in these on an ongoing basis, so that there is a clear picture of needs and how they are evolving. Such a system would also provide a benchmark for ex post evaluation of activities. DG AGRI should

build its own capability to make needs assessments as a basis for its own work and to judge those of others.

## **G. Monitoring, checking and evaluation of the information measures**

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### **CONCLUSIONS**

We concluded that there are weaknesses in the ex ante needs assessment and ex post impact evaluation of both direct and indirect actions, including weak prior target setting, the lack of a clear dissemination strategy, of a structured approach to ex post evaluations and of systematic monitoring of activities for their communications effectiveness as opposed to financial compliance.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

We recommend that DG AGRI:

- pay much closer attention to monitoring and evaluation of all projects. The results of this should form the basis for the selection of activities to make them more consistent with the objectives of the information policy;
- consider the implementation of an appropriate system to collect, analyse and share the feedback provided by the target group/applicants and the information passed on to the European Commission through this channel.
- define and develop from the beginning the measurement system and set of indicators to be used in order to evaluate the information measures.

More specific recommendations have been made in relation to each direct action tool, in the main report.

## **General conclusions and recommendations**

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### **CONCLUSIONS**

The sums of money available for information policy on the CAP, and for individual activities, were small by any standards. With such limited resources, the task of officials implementing the policy would have been made easier if there had been a clearer strategic direction for DG AGRI's information policy as a whole with clearly defined written policy objectives and priority target groups.

In the absence of these, the Information Unit in DG AGRI, with which responsibility for delivery ultimately rested, found itself in a situation during the period, where it was juggling priorities without a framework establishing the appropriate focus to bring the most effective result.

Implicit objectives did exist and were relevant to the information needs of the target groups –but they were not always implemented in an optimal manner, albeit there were areas where significant improvements were introduced from the middle of the period onwards.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend that DG AGRI:

- have a structured written strategy framework for its information policy;
- be proactive in promoting the availability of the funding;
- update the strategy and the operational objectives for its information policy when necessary;
- limit itself for its ultimate target groups, i.e. farmers and the general public, to a set of clear and consistent messages;
- define priority target sub-groups and develop appropriate dissemination strategies in order to reach these;
- spread its activities more evenly across the EU as a whole, and provide information in a wider range of languages;
- establish a hierarchy and mutually reinforcing mix of tools by target group;
- base all the above on continuous measurement of needs and impact via appropriate tools;
- design a monitoring system which enables the collection of data in the course of and at the end of projects in order further to feed the strategic process;
- establish mechanisms for obtaining and systematically applying feedback on its own activities, and appropriating within DG AGRI and disseminating externally lessons learned from indirect actions;
- introduce costing techniques which will allow it to measure efficiency of direct and indirect actions in terms of communication objectives;
- acquire a deeper understanding of the information activities of the Member States and stakeholder organisations;
- work more closely with external players on tools, timing and messages.