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Dear workshop participants,

It's a great pleasure for me to be here today. I really do feel that the name of this workshop, literally "**Agriculture for Sustainable Development - a Dialogue on Societal Demand, Pressures and Options for Policy**", describes the current situation in policy-making quite as it is: The agricultural sector no longer just produces raw material for the food industry - it is also subject to continuous debates and discussion in the society, full of demands and pressures.

Sustainable agriculture as a term is not really a matter of strict scientific definition, but more than that, a question of societal consensus.

Therefore, policy-making is not a one-way street but a process of continuous consultation and debate. In such circumstances scientific advice for policy-making is vital. Scientific evidence is one of the cornerstones of credibility. Without this evidence, any policy decision is open for attack from any direction.

The Finnish Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry is very much committed to knowledge-based governance. Under the Ministry there are five research institutes, which report regularly to the Ministry. These institutes cover the sectors of agriculture and food, animal health and food safety, forestry, game and fisheries, and land surveying. The Ministry also has a research budget for open competition. Both the

institutes and the competitive research budget are used to produce scientific evidence for decision-making, as well as to promote innovation for the development of the sectors governed by the Ministry.

Researchers not only produce research results, but they are also involved in various working groups preparing policy decisions. This has been the case, for example, when revising the Finnish agri-environmental scheme, preparing national schemes for animal health and well-being, as well as when preparing the legislation for the use of animal by-products as fertilisers.

Finland has taken seriously the initiative of the Dutch Presidency in 2005 to increase the co-operation of research funding organisations and agricultural policy-makers, so as to move towards a joint European Research Agenda in agricultural and rural research, and to strengthen the role of scientific advice in decision-making. Therefore, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry has participated actively in the work of the re-organised SCAR-committee (Standing Committee for Agricultural Research). The Ministry has also been involved in some ERA-Nets, such as ERA-Net for Statutory Plant Health, ERA-Net for Organic Farming and ERA-Net for Wood Material Science¹.

In policy-oriented research, the researchers have to choose the policy that they wish to support. In agricultural policy, it is easy to see that in the European Union there is one Common Agricultural Policy, supplemented by 25 national policies. These policies are very often competing and even contradictory. Therefore, it is very likely that national agricultural research is inclined to support the national policy

¹ ERA-Net on EU:n tutkimuksen puiteohjelman toimi, jolla EU verkottaa kansallisia tutkimuksen rahoittajia, tavoitteena luoda yhtenäistä eurooppalaista tutkimusaluetta

and less so the common European objectives. It may not come as a surprise that this is also sometimes the case in Finland as well as in the other Member States. But even when supporting the national policy, we must understand that international influence is increasing. The basis of rules and regulations is increasingly international, and at the same time, it is more and more science-driven. Therefore, the Member States should think globally even when acting locally. This applies to policies, but also to science.

Science should be as independent and unbiased as possible. In policy-oriented research, the researcher can and should have a wider scope than local politician, often bound with national expectations, especially before elections, as is the case in Finland next year. In complex and sometimes conflicting situations, science can tell us what *could* be done, whereas the political judgement must determine what *should* be done. This interaction is discussed quite thoroughly in DEFRA document "Evidence and Innovation" published in 2005.

The Finnish Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry uses scientific evidence as the basis for decision making. But I am not saying this is always easy! The dialogue between science and policy can sometimes be somewhat cumbersome. The policy-maker needs simple and clear-cut problem-oriented results which can be applied directly into practise. The scientist, however, is thrilled with his or her methodology development, leading to a refereed article in a journal the policy-maker has never heard of. The policy-maker needs the answer now, or tomorrow at the latest, whereas the scientist considers a three year project much too short to gain anything significant.

This is a situation where mutual understanding must be developed. Research institutes must have the possibility to carry out long-term research aiming at new methods and cutting-edge science. But the institutes must keep in mind that their existence depends on their ability to produce applicable results for the society. We need less "nice-to-know" research and must focus more heavily on "need to know" research, especially in applied sciences.

At the same time, the policy-maker should develop its ability to discuss with scientists, to put the relevant policy questions into a form that can be translated into a research question. And of course, the policy-maker should be able to put the question on the table a little earlier so that the scientists can take their time to solve the problem. For instance, I see some new challenges in research on our renewed CAP and its impacts on the agriculture sector. In the next few years the production of bioenergy will be another topical issue in several fields of agribusiness.

I trust that this policy dialogue workshop will make a significant contribution to this important issue and help to make more use of better science in responsible and constructive policy-making.

Thank you.