

NEWSLETTER

This newsletter informs you about the main findings of a project called SASSPO (*Agriculture for Sustainable Development: A dialogue on societal demand, pressures and options for policy*). SASSPO assessed the achievements and future needs of scientific support to agricultural policies in the European Union by using the existing research results and democratic deliberation.

The following four topics were identified to be vital in increasing our understanding about the role of agriculture for sustainable development of society at large. Moreover, the policy dialogue process is briefly presented.

Legitimisation of the policy

The CAP needs further legitimisation, and more attention should be paid to the internal and external coherence with other policy areas and changing societal demands. Attention is needed both for market (price and income instability, abuse of market power in the agri-food chain, externalities) and government failures (equity and distribution). The societal demand can be addressed with more balanced incorporation of various interests (citizens, tax-payers, consumers, rural dwellers). In order to mitigate the influence of vested national interests, the role of formal and informal institutions, which are not responsible for the defence and promotion of official national standpoints, should be increased in the decision-making process.

In order to improve the bases of the CAP, options for more democratic decision-making in the CAP should be studied, covering better all stakeholders and getting more in line with EU policy decision-making in general. More information is needed on the impact of the CAP and agriculture on EU economy, employment, growth, social and territorial cohesion, as well as on ways of improving the complementarity of different EU policies.

Changes in agricultural employment

Due to changes in agricultural production, technological development, the declining shares of agriculture in the total economy and increasing labour mobility, the way how work within agriculture is organised changes rapidly. Employment issues concerning agriculture should be governed in close cooperation among the other policy sectors.

Research is needed on the growing importance of contracting and on agricultural immigrant labour from social and economic perspectives (e.g. impacts on rural societies, on product price, quality and safety on farms). Differences in the use of labour are neglected in policies designed on the basis of statistical averages. Employment in agriculture should be studied with multidisciplinary approaches. For example, very small, 'non-enterprise' farms are an important issue connected to pluriactivity and hence to the general employment in the southern member states, while the low income level of agriculture impacts the development of whole economy in central and eastern member states.

Member states implementing the CAP

Agricultural and rural problems differ considerably across Europe. Hence, more flexibility in policy content and funding arrangements such as tailoring and targeting should be allowed. Institutional structures should be developed at the appropriate level of administration in order to improve the quality and efficiency of the implementation of the CAP. Member states should not be required to adapt any new policy reforms before the previous reforms and measures have been fully implemented.

SASSPO

Agriculture for Sustainable Development:

A dialogue on societal demand, pressures and options for policy

Research needs include the improvement of the statistical base of the new member states to make the statistics comparable with the EU-15. There are problems both with the before-accession statistics and with the availability of current detailed data from regional and sub-regional levels. The key research task is how to determine the appropriate level (EU, national, regional, local) of administration for different policy measures.

Monitoring of policy outcomes at the regional and sub-regional levels

Information on the impacts of applied policy measures is lacking. The lack of data and information relates to economic, environmental as well as social impacts of the CAP. In order to improve policy measures, more knowledge is needed about the regional and sub-regional impacts of the CAP. A topic of special interest for both researchers and policy makers is the way in which research results actually contribute to policy decisions.

Monitoring and evaluation studies should be developed further to cover the direct impacts as well as indirect, non-agricultural and externality type outcomes of the CAP at the different levels. More research is also needed on how the implementation of the CAP contributes to the general objectives of the EU.

Policy dialogues as a means to engage stakeholders in policy process

Policy dialogues are examples of deliberative procedures linked to new forms of governance, which include not only the public sector but different actors representing the market and the civil society. Policy dialogue refers to a facilitated process in which stakeholders together with actors from science and policy jointly deliberate on a specific complex policy issue, explore potential solutions and formulate policy recommendations. In the CAP, the range of stakeholders is broad, covering for instance farmers, environmentalists, rural interests, food industry, pesticides industry, consumers, inhabitants and other 'users' of the countryside, politicians, officials and researchers working with the CAP, different member states and different levels of administration.

The participants of the SASSPO dialogues found that there is a need for an arena where various stakeholders, experts and decision-makers can exchange views and information. The arena should be established outside the ordinary structure, however, used in connection to formal discussion in the current political debate. The timing of such dialogues is crucial. The even involvement of all kinds of stakeholders, in particular that of NGOs was underlined. Future-orientation is an important feature of the CAP policy dialogue, since there is a need for a long term policy agenda.

The objectives and the milestones of the project

SASSPO organised two policy dialogue seminars with participants from 18 EU member states as well as from the European Commission, OECD and environmental, farmers' and landowners' organisations. Based on the results of the policy dialogues and the background documents, four policy briefs were prepared in which the most crucial policy issues, policy recommendations and research needs were presented. SASSPO was funded by the European Commission as part of the Sixth Research Framework Programme. The project was conducted by MTT Economic Research, Finland, and LEI Agricultural Economics Research Institute, the Netherlands.

Further information

More information about the project is available at the SASSPO Internet site, www.mtt.fi/sasspo.

Coordinator Professor Hilikka Vihinen, MTT Agrifood Research Finland

e-mail: hilkka.vihinen@mtt.fi, tel. +358 9 5608 6313