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Slovenia's new agri-environment programme

On 19 April 2001 the Government of the Republic of Slovenia adopted a decree on the first Slovene Agri-Environmental Programme. The strategic guidelines of the Slovene Agri-Environmental Programme are defined in the "Slovene Programme of the Agricultural Policy Reform", in the section referring to structural changes in agriculture. The entire programme represents considerable progress from the conventional type of agriculture towards sustainable farming methods. Nowadays financial support in agriculture is not associated exclusively with production, but direct payments have been altered to support the ecological, social and spatial aspects of agriculture

In this respect, Slovene agriculture has been adjusting to the demands of the European Union. The Slovene Agri-Environmental Programme is intended to facilitate a gradual transition to EU agricultural policy and, once Slovenia joins the EU, access to EU funds established for this purpose. Its main goal is to popularise farming methods which are better suited to the needs of consumers, and which protect human health, ensure sustainable use of natural resources, and preserve biodiversity and characteristic features of the Slovenian countryside. The Slovene Agri-Environmental Programme is divided into four basic groups that define the type and content of direct payment measures, as listed below. In the first year a pilot programme consisting of only ten measures will be implemented.

Group I - Reduction of the negative influences of agriculture on the environment:

- Reduction of livestock density;
- Revitalisation of agricultural land;

- Protection against erosion in orchards and vineyards;
- Crop rotation stabilisation;
- Conversion of arable land to grass;
- Integrated fruit production;
- Integrated wine production;
- Integrated horticulture;
- Organic farming.

Group II - Preservation of nature, biodiversity, soil fertility and the traditional cultural landscape:

- Maintenance of mountainous pastures;
- Mowing of steep slopes;
- Mowing of humpy meadows;
- Maintenance of meadow orchards;
- Breeding of traditional and rare domestic livestock breeds;
- Production of traditional and rare crops;
- Sustainable animal breeding;
- Extensive grassland maintenance.

Group III - Conservation of protected areas:

- Maintenance of the cultural landscape in protected areas;
- Restructuring animal husbandry in the areas with the highest density of large carnivores;
- Preservation of the habitats of endangered bird species;
- Permanent green cover in ground-water protected areas (buffer strips);
- Conversion to grass and green fallow.

Group IV - education and promotion (not through direct payment):

Education programmes will be organised for farmers and from the state administration officials and public institutions. Participation in the training sessions is compulsory for farmers involved in the programme. Through promotion activities, the programme

will be presented to the general public. In addition, consumers will be informed about new products and the quality of sustainably-produced agricultural products and foodstuffs.

The beneficiaries of direct payments will be farms implementing one or several of the measures. Participation in the programme is voluntary, and farmers choose the measures that they will implement on their farm or a part thereof. Participants must sign a five-year contract on programme implementation with the ministry of agriculture.

With the aim of establishing close supervision of the implementation of contracts, information will be collected and evaluated through monitoring and assessment. Since not all the parameters which are likely to be influenced by

agricultural measures are readily measurable, control indicators (both short-term and long-term) have been defined for individual measures in the programme. The effects of the agri-environmental measures will be assessed on the basis of these indicators.

The first payments to farmers under this new agri-environment programme will begin in July 2001, and it is expected that more than 10,000 farm holdings will take part in the programme during the first year.

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Lessons learned during development of agri-environment schemes in Northern Ireland

Dr Harry Gracey, Head of the Countryside Management Division at the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development in Northern Ireland, has taken a lead role in the development of EU agri-environment policy in the province from the very beginning. Dr Gracey was responsible for developing the first agri-environment schemes in Northern Ireland from scratch in 1987. His division now includes 50 staff, whose role is to provide technical support to policy, and to promote and implement agri-environment schemes and initiatives relating to agri-environment. They work on many different aspects of agri-environment policy, including scheme design, farm information and training, processing of

applications, farmer control, biological monitoring and evaluation. Dr Gracey describes below the valuable lessons he learned during the development of the highly successful 'Environmentally Sensitive Areas' and 'Countryside Management' schemes.

What did you consider were the first priorities when you began developing Northern Ireland's first agri-environment schemes?

From the outset I realised it was important not to view agriculture and the environment as two separate disciplines. There is a need to attain a balance between the two when developing and delivering environmental measures, so that both

agricultural sustainability and environmental desirability can be achieved. We have therefore actively sought out and employed people who have knowledge of both disciplines to develop and deliver our schemes.

What were the advantages of the pilot study?

The pilot study helped us to categorise which management prescriptions should be considered as ‘Good Farming Practice’ and which a farmer should receive a compensatory payment for. We were also able to modify the management prescriptions to maximise their ability to achieve the scheme’s objectives. Another benefit of the pilot study was that it helped us to assess the scheme’s impact on farm businesses, and therefore helped with the difficult task of estimating management payments.

What advice would you give to anyone developing management prescriptions?

Comprehensive research is vital at the outset. It is then important to identify a formula for presenting the prescriptions for each habitat, and finally to continually review them at each and every stage of the scheme’s development. I think that promoting an ethos of continual development is key to the long-term success of any agri-environment scheme.

How did you formulate the criteria for selecting participants?

We thought it was important that where over-subscription arises, applicants understand why they have been rejected. We tried therefore, to develop a selection mechanism that could prioritise applications. We attributed each of the targeted habitats and

features with a score that reflected its importance for biodiversity, vulnerability, irreversibility of potential damage, and rarity. Applications were then ranked according to their scores. This was a new concept within agri-environment schemes, and was simple and transparent for both applicants and administrators. This selection system is now applied uniformly throughout Northern Ireland.

What did you consider the most important lesson learned during development of Northern Ireland’s agri-environment schemes?

That transparency and consultation with the widest group possible was beneficial for all interested parties. It has provided us with helpful feedback from farmers and the environmental NGOs for designing and improving specific agri-environment measures. It has also allowed us to explain to both groups what the thinking behind scheme proposals was, and about the administrative constraints that we need to take into account.

Your department has grown phenomenally over the last fifteen years. Are that many staff really required?

If you want to run an agri-environment scheme well, including appropriate control of agreements and environmental monitoring, you need to set aside about 10% of the total programme budget for administrative expenses and staff costs. We think our department is run efficiently, and we need all the staff we have to ensure the scheme runs smoothly and proficiently.

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Proposed regulation reforming the CAP sheep-meat regime agreed

A new regulation for the sheep and goat meat regime under the CAP was proposed by the Commission on 16 May 2001. If agreed by the Member States, it is intended to come into effect from January 2002 onwards. Disappointingly, the proposed regulation does not incorporate changes that would benefit the environment, for example through allowing Member States to experiment with area, rather than headage payments, or introducing extensification schemes. The emphasis is on simplification, improved transparency and predictability, and reduced administrative burden. It is proposed that the headage payment on ewes would be retained, although the

current variable premium for ewes would be replaced with a fixed flat rate payment applicable throughout the EU, irrespective of market conditions. It is proposed to raise the premium to a flat rate of EUR 21 per ewe, with a further supplement of EUR 7 for the Less Favoured Areas. The one concession to the environment is a new clear obligation on the Commission to report on the environmental consequences of sheep and goat farming and of the regime itself, particularly in LFAs. However, this is not due until the end of December 2005, very late in the process of preparations for the next budget round.

David Baldock, IEEP

A note on quota allocation

The allocation of quotas for sheep annual premia for accession countries is under discussion. The EU is proposing to base all quotas and reference quantities on 1995-1999 average outputs and yields. However, candidate countries have requested higher quotas on the grounds that their agricultural industries had not fully recovered from

their transition from centrally planned economies during that time, and therefore output was well below its potential. It is far from clear whether environmental concerns will influence the outcome.

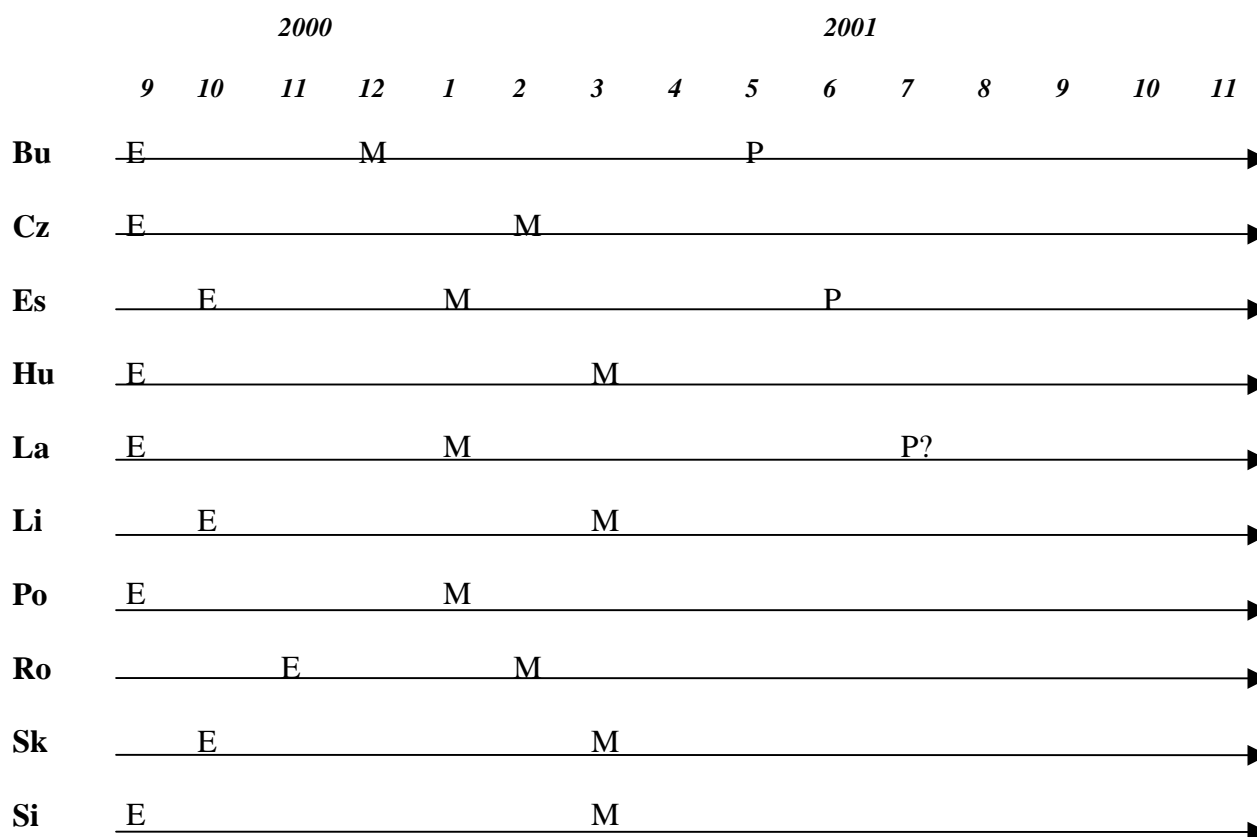
Harriet Bennett, IEEP

Progress on SAPARD

All ten CEECs have now signed their SAPARD Multi-Annual Financing Agreements with the European Commission, and have either concluded them, or are on the way to doing so. Before the disbursement of funds can be made to these countries, their SAPARD

implementing agency has to be accredited by the competent national authority, and these are then subject to a Commission Decision conferring management to the agency. Bulgaria and Estonia have already obtained such decisions.

Figure 1. Progress with SAPARD negotiations



E = SAPARD plan endorsed
 M = Multi-annual financing agreement signed
 P = Paying agency accredited (see comment above)

Source: European Commission website (http://europa.eu.int/comm/agriculture/external/enlarge/index_en.htm) and pers. comm. with SAPARD unit.

Harriet Bennett, IEEP

Danube-Carpathian joint declaration on environment and sustainable development

A *Green Light for Europe* summit on the environment and sustainable development in the Carpathian and Danube regions was held at the Palace of the Parliament in Bucharest, Romania, on 29-30 April 2001. The event was hosted by Ion Iliescu, President of Romania, and the Duke of Edinburgh, President Emeritus of WWF. The two-day event consisted of three separate forums. One forum was made up of visiting Heads of State, while the other two were comprised of Environmental Ministers and NGO and business interests. The participants

signed a joint declaration expressing their support for international and regional co-operation for maintaining and rehabilitating their natural assets and for improving the state of the environment in the Carpathian region and the Danube River Basin. It is intended that the early results of the declaration will be presented at the Rio+10 United Nations Conference in Johannesburg in 2002.

A website dedicated to the summit can be found at: www.greenlighteurope.com

Organic Action Plan for Europe

A European conference on the future of organic food and farming in Europe was held in Copenhagen on 10-11 May 2001. The conference aimed to catalyse the development of organic farming in Europe, and was organised by the Danish Ministry for Food, Agriculture and Fisheries and the Avalon Foundation. It was attended by European agriculture ministers and representatives from pan-European NGOs. The outcome of the conference was that attendants pledged to develop an Action Plan to formalise the organic

sector, covering EU Member States and CEECs.

The EU Agriculture Council welcomed the proposal to develop an Action Plan at its meeting in Luxembourg on 19 June 2001, and has asked the European Commission to draft a 'European Action Plan for Organic Food and Farming'.

For more information, visit:
www.organic-europe.net

Report on the interaction between agriculture and nature conservation in the candidate countries

A report on the High Level Conference on EU Enlargement in Wassenaar, entitled *The relation between agriculture and nature management* has been published by the Agricultural Economics Research Institute (LEI), and was compiled with partner organisations Veen Ecology, IEEP, Avalon, ERM, ETC Netherlands and dienst landelijk gebied. The 60-page document addresses current trends in

agriculture and environmental quality in candidate countries. A background of development of agri-environment policies in the EU is also described, and policy approaches and strategies for candidate countries are discussed.

The report can be downloaded from:
www.minlnv.nl/thema/internat/eu/verslagen/inftiev01.pdf