Safe Food for all European Consumers: The Farm to Table Principle - 50 Years Common Agricultural Policy

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Abstract. There are more than ten million farmers in the European Union (EU), accounting for more than five percent of direct jobs. Agriculture also provides employment to many people in the supply, the trade and services and in the food processing industry. The food in Europe comes for a significant proportion of farms in the EU. In response to the food shortages during and after World War II, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) of the EU stimulated in the beginning mainly the production of large quantities of food so that the union could supply its own needs. In general, this meant that farmers received more money if they produced more food. After some time, this resulted in over-production. This policy became too costly for taxpayers and lead to distortions in the pricing on the world market (through import levies and export subsidies). The recognition of this problem coincided with a growing concern about whether the CAP was an incentive for more intensive farming methods, which may impact on the environment and food safety. It led to a gradual reform (by the introduction of quotas, set-aside, ...) of the CAP, and finally payment of quantity was switched to direct income support to farmers. This approach has the additional advantage that the payments can be used to encourage farmers to:
- to produce safe food under hygienic conditions;
- to maintain high standards of animal welfare;
- to use environmentally friendly production techniques;
- to promote a sustainable rural economy.

This new approach is seen as the best way to combine several objectives:
- a reasonable income for farmers;
- an amount of affordable, safe food of high quality for consumers;
- an acceptable cost for the taxpayer;
- a fair access to EU markets and a competitive food industry.

The EU now places less emphasis on quantity and more on maintaining quality and on the role and the income of individual farmers by supporting farmers who participate in schemes designed to improve the quality of production and to improve and safeguard the processes. The present reforms (2014-2020), proposed by the Romanian EU Commissioner Dacian Cioărell, will lead to a more extensive farming and to a larger need of space. In the densely populated northwestern part of Europe, where an intensive and highly productive agricultural activity is developed, a differentiation of the future European policies is needed.

Keywords: Common Agricultural Policy; agriculture; food safety; rural development
INTRODUCTION
1962-2012: 50 years of sufficient safe and quality food

The creation of a common agricultural policy was proposed by the European member states in 1960. It followed the signing of the Treaty of Rome in 1957, which established the Common Market (EU, 1957). The initial objectives set out in Article 39 of the Treaty of Rome (1957) are:
- to increase productivity, by promoting technical progress and ensuring the optimum use of the factors, in particular labor;
- to ensure a fair standard of living for the agricultural community;
- to stabilize markets;
- to secure availability of supplies;
- to provide consumers with food at reasonable prices.

The principles of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) were set out at the Stresa (Italy) Conference in July 1958. In 1960, the CAP mechanisms were adopted by the six founding Member States and two years later, in 1962, the CAP came into force (EEC, 1963). The six member states individually strongly intervened in their agricultural sectors, in particular with regard to what was produced, maintaining prices for goods and how farming was organized. This intervention posed an obstacle to free trade in goods and while the rules continued to differ from state to state, freedom of trade would interfere with the intervention policies. Some Member States, in particular France, and all farming professional organizations wanted to maintain strong state intervention in agriculture. This could therefore only be achieved if policies were harmonized and transferred to the European Community level. By 1962, three major principles had been established to guide the CAP: market unity, community preference and financial solidarity. Since then, the CAP has been a central element in the European institutional system. Fifty years ago, the emphasis was on the production of sufficient food. Europe was still recovering from a decade of food shortages caused by the war. Production was subsidized and prices were supported by buying up surpluses.

The major milestones
The CAP has changed significantly over the years in which major changes can be distinguished (EU, 2012).
1962: The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is born. The essence of the policy is good prices for farmers. With every passing year, farmers produce more food. The shops are full of food at affordable prices. The first objective – food security – has been met.
1970 - 1980: Supply management. Farms are so productive that they are producing more food than is needed. Specific measures are put in place to align production with market needs.
1992: The CAP shifts from market support to producer support. Price support is replaced by direct aid payments. There is increased emphasis on food quality, protecting traditional and regional foods and on caring for the environment.
2000: The scope of the CAP is widened to include rural development. The CAP focuses on the economic, social and cultural development of Europe with targeted multi-annual programs.
2003: CAP reform cuts the link between subsidies and production. Farmers are more market oriented and – in view of the specific constraints on European agriculture – they receive an income aid. They have to respect environmental, animal welfare and food safety standards.
2007: EU farming population doubles, following recent enlargements with 12 new member states. EU’s agricultural and rural landscape changes as well.

2012: A new CAP reform to strengthen the economic and ecological competitiveness of the agricultural sector, to promote innovation, to combat climate change and to support employment and growth in rural area.

Despite the major reforms of recent years more changes will be needed as the current financing package expires in 2013. Major challenges, such as the need for global food production to double by 2050 (UN, 2011) due to population growth and increased meat consumption of affluent consumers, need to be faced despite the loss of biodiversity and degradation of soil and water quality by climate change.

European people have indicated in 2010 that the EU agricultural policy should not only help farmers to produce food, but also to include natural resources and to protect landscapes, to improve animal welfare and to keep rural communities livable (EC, 2010). To meet these demands the EU has responded with a reform proposal that puts emphasis on sustainable agricultural methods, innovation, research, dissemination of knowledge and a more equitable system of support that European farmers prepare for the challenges of tomorrow.

Financial safety nets are still there today, but they are used much more selectively. For example, financial interventions are used in emergencies such as natural disasters, disease outbreaks (e.g. foot and mouth disease) or large market imbalances that threatens whole sectors of the rural economy. In general the EU supplements the income of the farmers with direct payments, so they have a decent income. In exchange of that they must meet standards of hygiene, food safety, animal welfare, biodiversity and landscape protection.

The EU policy now aims to producers of all kinds of food to allow for:
- sufficient quantities of safe food of high quality products for European consumers;
- full contribution to the diversification and the economic development of rural areas;
- very strict standards on environmental protection and animal welfare.

FROM FARM TO FORK: SAFE FOOD FOR EUROPEAN CONSUMERS

Food safety is now one of the highest priorities of the European Union. In the initial objectives set out in Article 39 of the Treaty of Rome (1957) the quality of the food was not mentioned. Only in 2000 the European Commission adopted a White Paper on Food Safety (EC, 2000) and set out a 'Farm to Table' legislative action program. The strict EU rules were since 2000 further tightened up to ensure that food is extremely safe. A broad approach was chosen: both food and feed are monitored carefully from farm to fork. EU authorities make a careful assessment of risks and collect the best scientific advice before allowing a product, ingredient, additive or GMO. This applies to all feed and food, whether from inside or outside the EU. Safe doesn’t mean boring, as the EU calls for variation based on quality. European law protects traditional foods and local products and the European Union encourages farmers to increasingly focus on quality; not only in food production but also in paying attention to the rural environment. The EU respects the right of consumers to make an informed choice and stimulates public debate; proposes mandatory labeling information and publishes scientific advices.

European consumers want safe and healthy food (EC, 2004). The EU is constantly working to improve food safety, but the last few years the union has become even more active in this field. This was due to the food scandals in the nineties, such as the BSE crisis, dioxin in animal feed and toxic oil. The goal was not only to update the legislation for food safety, but also to ensure that consumers are informed about potential risks and the actions taken to
minimize risks. Risks can never be completely avoid, but can be minimized through a comprehensive food safety strategy. The EU food safety policy has four main points:

- rules for the safety of food and feed;
- independent, public available scientific advice;
- measures to monitor the rules and to control the processes;
- recognition of the right of consumers to make a choice based on full information.

**History of food safety policy**

In 1997 the European Commission published a Green Paper on European food law (EC, 1997), with the aim of launching a public debate on the extent to which current legislation on foodstuffs meets the needs and expectations of consumers, producers, manufacturers and traders and the extent to which measures to ensure the independence, objectivity, equivalence and effectiveness of the control and inspection systems are meeting their basic objectives to ensure a safe and wholesome supply. As a result of the Internal Market program and the implementation of the CAP, the vast majority of national food legislation has been harmonized at Community level. For many foodstuffs of agricultural origin, common quality standards have been laid down. However, European food law has developed piecemeal over time. Consequently, there is no central unifying text setting out the fundamental principles of food law and clearly defining the obligations of those concerned. The basic goals of Community food law are:

- to ensure a high level of protection of public health, safety and other consumer interests;
- to ensure the free movement of goods within the internal market;
- to ensure that the legislation is primarily based on scientific evidence and risk assessment;
- to ensure the competitiveness of European industry and enhance its export prospects;
- to place the primary responsibility for food safety on industry, producers and suppliers.

Moreover, food law must of course be coherent, rational and user friendly. With this Green Paper the Commission did not intend to question these objectives; they should be pursued further. But the Commission wished to launch a public debate on whether existing legislation meets the needs and expectations of consumers, producers, manufacturers and traders and whether the control and inspection systems operate satisfactorily.

Critics emphasized the disjointed nature of agricultural production policy in relation to consumption. The arguments were stressed during European Health Forum Gastein 2001 in Austria (Leiner et al., 2002). In 2008, the EU Commission edited a Green Paper on agricultural product quality including product standards, farming requirements and quality schemes and a consultation exercise (EC, 2008), followed by a communication on agricultural product quality policy in 2009 from the Commission, to the European Parliament, the Council, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. The Commission proposed options

- to simplify marketing standards, develop terms for labeling product qualities and make it compulsory to indicate where agricultural products were farmed;
- to improve the EU scheme for geographical indications, known as protected designations of origin (PDO) and protected geographical indications (PGI);
- to improve conditions for EU-wide trade in organic products certification schemes.

Farmers would get a fair return that reflects the quality of their products; consumers would be able to make informed choices when buying food and buyers of agricultural products.
(including the agro-food industry and retailers) would find it easier to identify the characteristics and quality of products.

The agricultural product qualities addressed in the Green Paper are the product characteristics, such as farming methods used, place of farming, etc., that a farmer wants to be better known and a consumer wants to know. Quality is an issue for every farmer and every buyer, whether they are dealing with commodities produced to baseline standards or with the high-end quality products. Today, EU policy aims to enable producers of all forms of food to produce sufficient quantities of safe, high-quality food for European consumers; to make a full contribution to diversified economic development in rural areas and to meet very high standards of environmental care and animal welfare (EU, 2012).

The consultation exercise (2008) and Communication (2009) of the Commission on agricultural product quality resulted in a ‘Quality Package’ in 2010. This Quality Package is the first step in the overhaul agricultural product quality policy, opening the way to a more coherent policy. On 12 October 2011 the Commission presented a set of legal proposals to reform the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) after 2013 (EC, 2012). It's stated aim is to guarantee European citizens healthy and quality food production, whilst preserving the environment. According to the proposal, the three broad objectives of the future CAP are viable food production; sustainable management of natural resources and balanced territorial development. These objectives respond directly to the economic, environmental and territorial balance challenges identified and guide the proposed changes. The main objective of the European Union’s food quality and food safety policy is to protect consumer health and interests while guaranteeing the smooth operation of the single market. In order to achieve this objective, the EU ensures that control standards are established and adhered to as regards food and food product hygiene, animal health and welfare, plant health and preventing the risk of contamination from external substances. It also lays down rules on appropriate labeling for these foodstuffs and food products. This policy underwent reform in the early 2000s, in line with the approach 'From the Farm to the Fork', thereby guaranteeing a high level of safety for foodstuffs and food products marketed within the EU, at all stages of the production and distribution chains. This approach involves both food products produced within the European Union and those imported from third countries. With consumers becoming ever more quality-conscious about food, voluntary EU quality marks now help them make educated choices. These labels – indicating geographic origin, use of traditional ingredients or methods, including organic – also helps to make EU farm products competitive on world markets.

European labels

As consumers increasingly attach importance to the quality of their food, EU labels are useful to make an informed choice (EC, 2006). These labels indicate the geographical origin or the use of traditional or organic ingredients or methods and make the European agriculture more competitive on the international market. The EU recognizes three logos. The logos for Protected Designations of Origin (PDO) and Protected Geographical Indications (PGI) are used for both agricultural products or foodstuffs which are strongly tied to a specific region or place. A product gets the PGI logo as a specific characteristic or reputation is linked to a particular area and at least one stage of production, processing or preparation occurs in that area. Flemish examples are 'Geraardbergse mattentaarten', 'Brussels grondwitloof' or 'Gentse azaleas'. This means that these names should be used only for pastry from Geraardsbergen, chicory in soil culture from the Brussels region and azaleas from the environs of Ghent; and only if these products meet certain quality standards. Romania had only one product registered yet ‘Magiun de prune Topoloveni’. Products bearing the PDO
logo have demonstrable characteristics that can only be the result of the natural environment and the skills of the producers in the producing region, for example ‘Vlaams Brabantse tafeldruiven’ (high quality grapes for fresh consumption grown in the province of Flemish Brabant). The logo Traditional Specialties Guaranteed (TSG) is used for products with specific characteristics from traditional ingredients or be prepared using traditional methods. This category includes products such as ‘Geuze’, ‘Lambic’ and ‘Kriek’, famous Belgian beers from the Brussels region.

The logo 'organic culture' (OC) is intended for food in accordance with recognized organic production standards (EC, 2008). This also means that farmers are not allowed to use synthetic pesticides or fertilizers. The EU regulation on organic culture describes how crops and livestock should be grown and how food and feed must be processed to use the label. The EU organic logo may only be used for products that comply with the regulation. The labeling must also state the name or code C741 of the controlling body that inspects and certifies organic farms. The EU logo is designed to allow consumers to recognize organic products easier. Products under EU organic regulation are required to be produced to use the logo since July 1, 2010, the two-year transitional period ended this summer.

THE CAP 2020: SMART, SUSTAINABLE AND INCLUSIVE GROWTH

The CAP towards 2020 means meeting the food, natural resources and territorial challenges of the future (EC, 2010). The primary role of agriculture is to supply food. Given that demand worldwide will continue rising in the future, the EU should be able to contribute to world food demand. Therefore it is essential that EU agriculture maintains its production capacity and improves it while respecting EU commitments in international trade and policy coherence for development. A strong agricultural sector is vital for the highly competitive food industry to remain an important part of EU economy and trade. One should not forget that the EU is the leading world exporter of, mostly processed and high value added,
agricultural products. It should also encourage the synergies between crop and livestock farming.

Moreover, EU citizens demand high quality and a wide choice of food products, reflecting high safety, quality and welfare standards, including local products. In this context, the issues of access, availability and acceptability of healthy food and nutritional efficiency have also become more apparent. EU agriculture finds itself today in a considerably more competitive environment, as the world economy is increasingly integrated and the trading system more liberalized. This trend is expected to continue in the coming years, in view of the possible conclusion of the Doha round negotiations and of the bilateral and regional agreements at present under negotiation.

Improving the functioning of the food supply chain is necessary (EC, 2009). Long term prospects for agriculture will not improve if farmers cannot reverse the steadily decreasing trend in their share of the value added generated by the food supply chain. Indeed, the share of agriculture in the food supply chain has decreased from 29% in 2000 to 24% in 2005, while over the same period the share of the food industry, wholesale and the distribution sector have all increased. Without well-functioning transmission of market signals, the long-term prospects of the farm sector and its share of the value added generated by the whole food chain are in jeopardy. Key issues of interest relate to the current imbalance of bargaining power along the chain, the level of competition at each stage in the chain, the contractual relations, the need for restructuring and consolidation of the farm sector, transparency and the functioning of the agricultural commodity derivatives markets.

The Commission Communication of 18 November 2010 ‘The CAP 2020: Responding to the challenges of the future food, natural resources and territorial’, is about the issues agriculture and the CAP will face in the coming years. The challenges were based on an analysis of past experiences, current situation and the broad public debate that took place in 2010. The focus is mainly on a sustainable, high quality agricultural production, the protection of natural resources and the preservation of the agricultural sector over the entire territory.

Objectives

Food safety. In the following decades, global demand for food will continue to increase. The EU should be able to make a contribution and to meet the demand. It is essential that the EU maintains and increases its production. EU citizens want a wide range of food products that are of high quality and meet very strict standards for safety, quality and animal welfare standards. A sustainable agriculture is crucial to the highly competitive food industry which is an important part of the economy and the trade in the EU.

Natural resources. Agricultural activities leave their mark on the environment (possibly causing water pollution, soil depletion, water shortages, loss of habitats of animals in the wild), but can also have positive effects (including climate stability, biodiversity, landscapes, greater resilience to natural disasters). The EU should make efforts to reduce the negative impacts and to encourage the positive effects of agriculture. The future CAP must increase energy efficiency, carbon capture and energy production from biomass and increase renewable sources. In other words, innovation is needed.

Balanced territorial development. In most EU countries agriculture still is the driving force for the rural economy. There is a close link between the vitality and potential of many EU rural areas and the presence of a competitive and dynamic agricultural sector that is attractive to young farmers.
**Instruments**

**Direct payments.** To achieve the stated objectives an adaptation of the system of direct payments with a view to better targeting and greater redistribution is provided. The proposal indicates that the future direct payments support to the basic income of farmers through a decoupled payment (upper bounded, better targeting to active farmers, simple aid for small farmers and more attention to areas that suffer specific natural handicaps). The Commission proposes the introduction of a 'greening' component for direct payments. This ‘greening’ component would it make possible to reach the objectives in the field of environment and climate (e.g. permanent pasture, green cover, crop rotation and ecological set-aside, and others).

**Market measures.** The CAP need to maintain the overall market orientation of the agricultural sector and it must include the market management tools that have demonstrated their important role in times of crisis and disruption. In the next few years, certain agricultural markets will evolve. For sugar, for example, the current scheme normally comes to an end in 2014/2015 and the abolition of milk quota is in prospect. The Commission also believes that more general measures are necessary for better functioning and higher transparency of the food chain and for a greater balance in the negotiating positions.

**Rural Development.** The importance of rural development that the EU carries out through the CAP is underlined. The Commission wishes to emphasize competitiveness of the agricultural sector by encouraging innovation, by stimulating sustainable management of natural resources and by supporting a balanced territorial development through encouragement of local initiatives. A risk management toolkit should be introduced to more effectively deal with income uncertainties and market volatility.

**The downside: ‘greening as a threat**

The future of direct payments to be granted to active farmers could be based on the concept proposed by the European Parliament. It includes enhancement of environmental performance of the CAP through a mandatory ‘greening’ component of direct payments by supporting environmental measures applicable across the whole of the EU territory. Priority should be given to actions addressing both climate and environment policy goals. These could take the form of simple, generalized, non-contractual and annual environmental actions that go beyond cross-compliance and are linked to agriculture (e.g. permanent pasture, green cover, crop rotation and ecological set-aside). In addition, the possibility of including the requirements of current NATURA 2000 areas and enhancing certain elements of Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions (GAEC) standards should be analyzed (EC, 2003).

The GAEC standards are defined in the framework of the cross compliance. In order to ensure that all agricultural land, even if not used for production purposes, is maintained in good agricultural and environmental conditions, Member States define minimum requirements, at national or at regional level. Member States also ensure that land which was under permanent pasture at the date provided for the area aid applications for 2003 is maintained under permanent pasture. For new Member States this condition refers to the land which was under permanent pasture on 1 May 2004; for Bulgaria and Romania on 1 January 2007. Member States have the obligation at member state level to ensure the maintenance of the ratio of the land under permanent pasture in relation to the total agricultural area. They also have to implement measures at the level of the farms if the ratio of permanent pasture in the member state decreases.
The EU now places less emphasis on quantity and more on maintaining quality and the role and the income of individual farmers. The present reforms (2014-2020) will lead to a more extensive farming and to a larger need of arable land. The proposals, as they are now, push intensive agriculture to the loss (VILT, 2011). The proposed CAP budget decreases over the years by 12.5 percent by non-indexing and the redistribution of resources between Member States costs the northwest European agricultural additional more than 7.5 percent. Above all, the proposed ‘greening’, amounting up to 30% of direct payments, leaves few opportunities for the specific context of agriculture in an urban and suburban area.

Although this might fit with what society expects of a European agricultural policy; the effect completely ignores the specificity of farmers in an urbanized area where every square meter is used, the population density is exceptionally high and agriculture takes place in the backyard of cities, industrial areas, residential areas and nature reserves. The proposed ‘greening’ measures are difficult to apply in that context. Farmer unions claim that they are saddling agriculture with additional administration and costs without a clear environmental benefit. Moreover, they put pressure on productivity and efficiency of the sector, which is very disadvantageous to the competitiveness of intensive agriculture.

The northwest European farmers focus on ‘green growth’ measures; to feed the population the global food production must increase by 70% by 2050. ‘Green growth’ looks for win-win situations where ecology and economy can be reconciled. It's about completing all the social expectations, both ecological and food supply. How this is to be done varies between regions, farming systems and sectors.

**CONCLUSION**

Food safety is now one of the highest priorities of the European Union. In the initial objectives set out in Article 39 of the Treaty of Rome (1957) the quality of the food was not mentioned. Only in 2000 the European Commission adopted a White Paper on Food Safety and set out a 'Farm to Table' legislative action program. The strict EU rules were since 2000 further tightened up to ensure that food is extremely safe.

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The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) places less emphasis on quantity and more on maintaining quality and the role and the income of individual farmers. The future CAP should support an agricultural sector that is both economically and environmentally sustainable. The European Union must rely on a strong Common Agricultural Policy in which the potential for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in rural areas is further developed. In the light of the challenges outlined, this necessitates a regionally differentiated policy.

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