

European
Citizens'
Seminars

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European public policy design
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The Erfurt Meetings

Labelling and promoting a socio-economically and
environmentally sustainable agriculture

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Labelling and promoting a socio-economically and environmentally sustainable agriculture

Summary

To propose consumer-relevant information with regards to socio-economic, environmental sustainability of agricultural / food production practices.

Expected contribution to the common good

This policy is intended to allow the development of socio-economic & environmentally sustainable agricultural systems. This will allow the present generation to meet its needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. Labelling could be one effective means of communication providing assurance on the sustainability of quality, safety and reliability of the product. Implementation will ensure respect for natural resources, enhance social and human capital and be economically viable.

Anticipated effects

1. Effects in the direction of the common good

The anticipated positive effects of the implementation of this policy are to influence human behaviour towards respecting and supporting the sustainability of:

1. All natural resources
2. Human and animal well being
3. Healthy economic growth

2. Negative effects, accepted drawbacks and risks

- *for the Consumers*

Confusion in the already existing jungle of food information and means of communication. Concern if this policy will lead to higher price to be paid for products.

- *for the Member States and EU Institutions*

Need for common tool may be questioned, since market regulation could prevail and implementation is burdensome. Cost of communication to the consumer of new tool.

- *for Agriculture*

More cost for implementation without immediate return on investment. May not be competitive advantage.

- *for Food processing companies*

More cost for implementation of process, supply and labelling without immediate return on investment. Loss of flexibility in supply chain. May not be competitive advantage. Technical issues concerning labelling (space on packaging, graphic issues etc.)

- *for Retailers*

More cost for implementation of process, supply and labelling without immediate return on investment. Loss of flexibility in supply chain. May not be competitive advantage. Resistance due to own schemes presently in use.

- *for Third countries*

Could be disadvantageous to third countries producers, because they may have difficulties in meeting same standards and some countries have presently no sustainability system in place.

- *for Other related industry (packaging, pesticides)*

More cost of implementation of more sustainable packaging production use. Possibly cost for more sustainable chemical use.

- *for Civil society organisations*

Could be disadvantageous to poor countries producers. Doubtful effect on global sustainability.

Public bodies in charge

1. The regulation

The European Union authorities will need to pass a directive setting the overall framework for a sustainable agricultural supply chain.

Member State national and local authorities will be required to pass regulations to transpose the directive into domestic law.

The European Union authorities should introduce these concepts of transparent labelling into the appropriate international discourses.

Third country authorities may see fit to engage in parallel processes of regulation to achieve a more sustainable agricultural supply chain.

2. Implementation

Member State local and national authorities will have to set up the appropriate mechanisms to guarantee compliance. These authorities may delegate powers of implementation to public and private bodies.

Third country private suppliers to the EU may be controlled by certification bodies accredited by relevant international bodies such as ISEAL

3. Costs associated with implementation

It is anticipated that there will be costs associated with implementation but that the benefits of ensuring sustainability in the rural environment will be recognised by consumers in the price paid for the food as labelled

As it is essential to have a sustainable agricultural supply chain, the public authorities will need to prime the pump, by promoting awareness of sustainability issues in the agricultural supply chain.

Detailed description

1. Environmental sustainability

We recognise five principles that describe environmental sustainability:

1. Minimise the impact on climate change

Minimise greenhouse gas emissions along the whole chain (including the farm level).
Capture and store carbon in agriculture.

2. Respect the integrity of environmental media

Environmental media refers to soil, sea, freshwater, and air

3. Conserve biological diversity

Comply with the Convention on Biological Diversity

Conserve genetic resources and pollinators

Avoid the conversion of high conservation value areas to agriculture

4. Ensure access to sufficient natural resources for this and future generations

As an example, adhere to the FAO code of conduct on sustainable fisheries

5. Optimise land use

For example, select crops and animals that are best adapted to each situation, use best available technologies, use the best land for agriculture and do not extend into marginal land.

2. Social sustainability

The following six principles define social sustainability.

1. Respect human rights

Apply international standards

2. Respect workers' rights

Apply international standards

Ensure decent living wage for workers and producers

3. Respect property rights

Respect intellectual property rights, including traditional knowledge, and communities' rights, such as access to natural resources.

4. Maintain human capital in the labour force

5. Secure access rights for producers to the means of production

These rights would include, for example: Access to knowledge, technology, land and water rights and capital

6. Treat animals well

Where animals are treated well and their needs are met they will be more productive and thus their production more profitable.

Stressed animals tend to give meat and livestock products of a lower quality and use of medication in the food chain can give rise to increased risk of human disease as well as reduced effectiveness of human medication

3. Economic sustainability.

Economic sustainability should encompass the impact at the macro and micro levels. It is assumed that by ensuring a positive impact on micro economic sustainability, a positive impact at the macro level will be achieved by addition.

1. Farmers should be rewarded for the positive externalities of sustainable agriculture

2. Profitability of the farm

The farming system should provide an income for the farmer that allows her/him to have, at least, the same living standards as conventional agricultural farmer. This income should allow achieving stability and further development.

3. Farmers that pursue sustainable agriculture should be insured against the inherent risks.

4. Labelling

Purpose: Why communicate to the consumer?

1. To ensure consumer recognition of the added value of sustainable practices.
2. To inform the consumer so that he/she can make a reliable, fair and truthful choice.
3. To enable the consumer to compare and evaluate the sustainability of the practices declared
4. To allow the consumer to make an informed choice.
5. To encourage sustainable practices in food production.
6. To ensure premium payment for the added value of sustainable practices in food production.

How to communicate to the consumer?

1. By simple and reliable communication, by labelling as well as by other appropriate means (e.g. internet, packaging and advertising).
2. By voluntary choice of the supplier of the product, by codified standards and terms.

Control & Certification

1. Official EU guidelines on sustainable practices, harmonised with other systems and with compliance certified by an independent body using objective methods.
2. Endorsed by interaction with representatives of society as such.
3. Consistent with international standards and accredited certification systems. (ISO 17065)
4. Control should be consistent with other EU instruments, such as cross-compliance.

Means of communication

1. Easy understandable graphic illustration
2. Compliance verified with all existing sustainability initiatives along the whole chain
3. Links to website
4. Public information campaign

Examples of possible "Sustainability Table" in Labelling (voluntary)

	Farming	Process	Packaging
Environmental	A		B
Social		A	
Economic	C		

	Farming	Process	Packaging
Environmental			
Social			
Economic			

Justification: why sustainable agriculture, why now

Agriculture is more than an economic approach to agricultural production. It is a way of life in interaction with natural resources. The FAO estimates that in order to attend the needs of an increasing world population, we will need to double food production by 2020. Achieving this goal while dealing with the unavoidable impacts of climate change and limiting the contribution of agriculture to climate change is the main challenge for agriculture in the 21st century.

The International Assessment of Agriculture Science and Technology (IAASTD) identifies in its report of April 2008 the promotion of smallholder environmentally and socio-economically sustainable agriculture as the main strategy to achieve this goal. An environmentally and socio-economically sustainable agriculture is one that provides the social and environmental goods and services that we and future generations and non-human beings need. Sustainability should apply in the whole production chain, including production, processing, packaging and delivering.

The European Union is committed to the promotion of sustainable agriculture. The cross compliance requirements in the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) are a step in this direction, and further discussion will take place in preparation of the post 2013 CAP. The European Commission elaborated in October 2008 a Green Paper on agricultural product quality that suggests the need to harmonise the different quality schemes to promote a clear distinction of the high quality of European products, reduce consumer confusion and ensure prices reflect product quality. It is acknowledged that farmers should not bear the cost of these requirements, or those costs for the quality control.

Sustainable Agriculture is much more than environmental protection and adherence to the principles. It is not just cross compliance with existing directives and initiatives. It is an overarching policy that can encompass and harmonise many of the current initiatives. Many existing labelling practices already have elements of sustainability but this policy is to be both comprehensive yet implementable through measurable indicators. Although the primary impact will be agricultural production it is also intended to encompass rural development, food processing and packaging.

Further development: indicators and criteria

The definition of concrete criteria and indicators to measure a socio-economically and environmentally sustainable agriculture is a long-term, highly technical task. First, indicative, criteria and indicators that could be considered when using the principles detailed above are available for consultation, discussion and improvement on the blog of the "European Citizens' Seminars e.V." association at the following URL:
<http://citizenseminars.blogactiv.eu/2009/04/05/sustainabilitycriteria/>

Erfurt (Germany), 31st March 2009

This document is the output of the common work of a group of 19 European professionals, gathered in Erfurt (Germany) from 28th to 31st March 2009, comprised of:

- *Anja Åkerlund*
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- *Richard Perkins*
- *Alberto Ribeiro de Almeida*
- *Virgilijus Skulskis*
- *Marta Stauder*
- *Luigi Tozzi*
- *and one anonymous participant.*

The group members originate from 14 different European Union Member States (Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom). They have an extensive experience in the issues of agriculture sustainability and labelling, gained at top and middle management levels in the direct operation of farms, in the fertiliser and crop protection industries, farmers' unions and cooperatives (both generalist and specific to protected indications of origin), the food processing industry (both SMEs and multinationals), agricultural consultancies, certification bodies, agrarian economics academic research institutes, national government, environmental protection, international solidarity and consumers' associations.

The participants are signing the text in their capacity as citizens. The text does not represent the official position of the organisations that employ them.

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The facilitator of the debates during the Seminar was Jan Beddeleem, member of Board of the "European Citizens' Seminars e.V." association.

Call for comments

The "European Citizens' Seminars e.V." considers publishing a more complete work on the issue of "Labelling and promoting a socio-economically and environmentally sustainable agriculture" at the earliest in September 2009. This document will contain the present text and those comments that have been approved by the group of participants. This further work will be regulated by the same copyright regime of Creative Commons "Attribution No Derivatives" license.

Comments to this document are therefore welcome.

Comments intended for potential publication should be sent to the group of participants for approval, at the following e-mail address:
2009.Participants@CitizenSeminars.eu

Other comments should be posted on our blog
<http://CitizenSeminars.Blogactiv.eu>

The fully independent "European Citizens' Seminars e.V." <http://www.CitizenSeminars.eu> association was founded by 7 citizens from 6 European Union Member States (Bulgaria, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Portugal), in Erfurt (Germany) in May 2006, and officially registered under the number VR 2345. Erfurt, in the Eastern part of Germany was chosen because of its situation at the heart of Europe, both East and West of the continent. The association's network of active members now covers 10 European countries.

The purpose of the association is to contribute to the design of technically sound and politically legitimate European public policies. To that end, it gathers very diverse European professionals in intensive workshops and publishes the result of their common work in "The Erfurt Meetings" series.

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