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DRAFT OPINION

of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety
for the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development
on the Health Check on the CAP
(2007/2195(INI))

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The Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety calls on the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions in its motion for a resolution:

1. Stresses the importance of a thriving agricultural sector and a viable rural environment in the EU, not only for economic reasons but also with a view to the preservation of the landscape and food security;
2. Considers it necessary, to that end, to develop in the direction of a sustainable, multifunctional agriculture in which farmers are encouraged to use environmentally sustainable agricultural methods (in particular conservation farming and organic farming);
3. Welcomes the fact that the Commission intends to respond to the challenge of climate change and to adapt its agricultural policy accordingly, supporting less intensive farming practices in order to improve the GHG emission prospects of the farming sector and stresses the need to preserve the environment and to restore ecosystems; underlines the contribution of intensive livestock farming to GHG emissions; calls on the Commission to present legislative proposals aiming at reducing these emissions by promoting a more extensive and sustainable agriculture, especially in animal husbandry;
4. Stresses that public funding for farming is linked to the performance in the fields of environment, nature and animal welfare and must be conditional on respect for essential environmental and animal welfare legislation in these fields (Cross-Compliance); urges the Commission not to weaken the existing cross-compliance provisions through so-called simplification, and to examine whether these requirements are sufficient to tackle the environmental impact of current production methods, in particular livestock farming methods; stresses the need to support a change in production models in the direction of sustainable agriculture; but at the same time calls on the Commission to scrap unnecessary administrative requirements and burdens; believes that additional provisions on water use, water quality and GHG emissions should be included in the cross-compliance scheme;
5. Points out that biodiversity is both affected, created and threatened by agriculture; considers that global, local and EU efforts are needed to protect the valuable ecosystem services that biodiversity provides, namely air and water purification, pollination of crops and protection from erosion;
6. Points out that in the current programming period 2007-2013, rural development (and its financing instrument EARDF) as the second pillar of CAP has an important regional impact; urges the Commission to stimulate the possibilities for a more coherent implementation in relation to the programmes in the regional policy (structural funds) in order to come to an integrated approach in fields where synergy can be obtained;
7. Underlines the strong relationship between agricultural activity and water quality and quantity and stresses that pressures from agriculture on the water

environment need to be managed in a sustainable manner; believes that environmental legislation in combination with the polluter pays principle should be the guiding principle for effective achievement of sustainable water management and environmental objectives;

8. Regrets that the Commission missed the opportunity to tackle more broadly the problems linked to increased imports of food and feed which do not correspond to EU standards and thus risk undermining the European Union's achievements in environmental, animal welfare and social conditioning of public aid; calls on the Commission to propose measures to remedy this situation as soon as possible and to ensure compliance with Community environmental and health legislation;

9. Believes that decoupling direct aid from agricultural production can in the long term contribute to reducing the negative environmental impact of European agriculture, provided that it is accompanied by strengthened support for sustainable practices in rural development;

10. Urges the Commission to show restraint in stimulating biofuels, since the environmental benefits of many such fuels are questionable at best, and since an increase of biofuel production in the EU could lead to rising food prices and food storages;

11. Urges the Commission to present a coherent set of proposals in order to stimulate the production of sustainable agro-energy capable of utilising the whole biomass, including by means of a certification scheme for sustainable agro-fuels and minimum requirements for the production of these fuels, and considering the potential of second generation agro-fuels that make use of residual products from agriculture, such as manure.

12. Calls for increased modulation rates and qualified degressive single farm payments including environmental and social modulation criteria; urges the Commission to make more funds available for more sustainable agricultural production methods and for rural development policies; is however concerned about the current tendency in Member States to focus their rural development programmes on farm investments; believes that rural development funds should be used predominantly for agro-environmental programmes and animal welfare measures. Leader-type measures and other more integrated approaches towards sustainable rural economies;

13. Is concerned that the abolition of mandatory set-aside will reduce the agricultural areas suitable for biodiversity and landscape conservation purposes, calls on the Commission to come up with a legislative proposal for establishing or maintaining natural habitats and extensive and sustainable practices which enhance biodiversity, especially in the most productive agricultural areas;

14. Calls on the Commission to step up research and technology transfer measures in order, in particular, to promote more environmentally- and

ecosystem-friendly production methods in the interests of sustainable agriculture;

15. Urges the Commission to present a coherent set of proposals in order to maintain and develop sustainable agricultural activity especially in less favoured areas and areas with natural handicaps,, as these are of crucial importance for protecting biodiversity and preserving ecosystems;

16. Draws attention to successful projects around the EU where cooperation at the local and regional level between farmers, environmental groups and authorities have successfully reduced the environmental impact of agriculture.

17. Underlines the importance of permanent grasslands and forests for protection of agricultural biodiversity, and calls on the Commission to remedy the weaknesses in preventing the conversion of grasslands into crop production.