

Regional Sustainability of Agriculture: Adapting Institutions and Policies to Enable Transition

Policy Brief

Farming Transitions: Pathways Towards
Regional Sustainability of Agriculture in Europe
is an EU-funded project providing insights from
seven European countries



Project duration: March 2011– May 2014

Published: March 2014



Introduction

Over the past decade the transition towards an increased sustainability in agriculture has been a central theme in the work of governments, NGOs and research institutions. However, despite the adoption of the notion of the sustainable development of agriculture as a basic European Commission (EC) policy principle, it is becoming increasingly clear that changes are needed to ensure that agriculture in the EU can meet the growing range of public goods and functions desired by European citizens (e.g. safe and high-quality food, renewable energy and fibre production, maintenance of the environment, viable rural communities, recreational and amenity landscapes). In FarmPath we believe that no single farm or farming system can or should be expected to meet the full range of public and industry demands on agriculture. Instead, we propose that increasing the sustainability of agriculture is best addressed by enabling **flexible combinations of farming models**. These models vary to reflect the specific opportunity sets embedded in regional culture, agricultural capability, diversification potential, ecology and historic ownership and governance structures. Of particular interest are the approaches to farming which are of most interest to young people – we believe this is a key element in the wider social and economic sustainability of farming systems.

The objectives of FarmPath are to explore **transition pathways** towards regional sustainability of agriculture. Transitions are not assessed in a value-neutral way, but based on a normative goal: enhancing the sustainability of a society. In FarmPath, sustainability is not taken as achieving a pre-defined set of values for selected criteria, rather it is socially negotiated and regionally adapted. Transitions are the result of unpredictable interactions between different stakeholders, shaped by power games, and need to adapt to new developments as they arise (Darnhofer 2011)¹. They are understood as co-evolutionary processes that cannot be steered or managed in a strict sense. Thus the transition to a sustainable society also requires new management and governance approaches. Based on this understanding, policy implications have been derived from the FarmPath empirical work. The systemic conceptualisation of change implies that long time horizons, multiplicity of actors and relevant processes, all at multiple levels of scale, are considered. Policy recommendations have been developed on the basis of FarmPath research conducted in seven European countries (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Portugal and Scotland, UK).

In the first half of the project, **case studies on transition pathways of 21 innovative regional agricultural initiatives** (grouped into seven thematic clusters) provided detailed insights from a multi-level perspective (see www.farmpath.eu/researchareas for more information). In the second half of the project, **visions for regional sustainability of agriculture** for the year 2030 and the **pathways** that lead to them have been

developed for seven selected regions (Bulgaria – Pazardjik and Plovdiv; Czech Republic – Plzeň region; France – Pays de Rennes; Germany – Freiburg; Greece – Imathia; Portugal – Montemor-o-Novo; and Scotland, UK – Aberdeenshire) in a participatory and transdisciplinary manner. Throughout the project, specific attention has been paid to young farmers and new entrants. Policy recommendations regarding **young farmers and new entrants** were brought together through detailed data analysis and literature reviews and are presented in a special section at the end of this document (see www.farmpath.eu/Futurevisionsforagriculture).

This policy brief gives a comprehensive overview of key findings and recommendations aiming mainly at the European and the national levels of implementation. Research teams involved in FarmPath field work identified institutional support needs and policy recommendations for different levels and actor groups. Policy workshops with relevant national and regional policy actors were conducted in the seven countries to verify and revise these recommendations. This brief particularly addresses policy actors in the field of agriculture and rural development, but also in innovation, research and sustainable development at the European and national levels. However, it is understood that actors of, and activities at, the regional and local levels are likewise important. Guidance for action for those levels has been included in the FarmPath handbook on 'Facilitating Sustainability of Agriculture at Regional Level – Principles and Case Studies from across Europe' (see www.farmpath.eu).

¹Darnhofer, I. (2011). Initial Conceptual Framework. Deliverable D2.1 (WP 2) of FarmPath: Farming Transitions: Pathways Towards Regional Sustainability of Agriculture in Europe. 26 August 2011.

OVERVIEW OF INITIATIVE CASE STUDIES AND REGIONS

Cluster theme	Case study on initiatives
Renewable energy production	On-farm wind energy production (Aberdeenshire, UK)
	On-farm biogas production (Vysočina, Czech Republic)
	On-farm biogas production in Wendland-Elbetal bio-energy region (Germany)
Lifestyle farming	Sustainable rural lifestyles (Zhelen, Bulgaria)
	New management in small-scale farming (Montemor-o-Novo, Portugal)
	Lifestyle land management (Aberdeenshire, UK)
Certification programmes	Integrating rural tourism and local food production for sustainable development (Elena, Bulgaria)
	A regional label for quality products and environmental protection (White Carpathians, Czech Republic)
	A local quality convention (Plastiras Lake, Greece)
Collaboration in agriculture	Collaborating for multifunctionality in the Montado silvo-pastoral system (Portugal)
	Formalised machinery and labour sharing (UK)
	Citizen shareholder capital for regional value creation (Freiburg, Germany)
Local food systems	New farmers' markets (Plzeň region, Czech Republic)
	Short supply chains around the city of Rennes (France)
	Integration of local winemaking and conventional tourism in Santorini (Greece)
High nature value farming	New agricultural practices in protected areas (Bulgaria)
	Valuing the Mediterranean wild resources (Portugal)
	Landscape management in the St Amarin Valley (France)
Reducing the environmental impact of farming	Collective action to reduce green algae (Brittany) (France)
	Ground water protection through organic farming (Mangfall valley, Germany)
	Adaptation for survival: The case of peach producers in Imathia (Greece)

Ten main policy themes make up the structure of the policy brief:

- (1) Enabling innovation: Building capacities and knowledge infrastructure
- (2) Enabling cooperation and networking
- (3) Reducing the administrative burden on farmers
- (4) Enabling environment-friendly and resource-efficient farming
- (5) Improving the image of agriculture and rural life in society
- (6) Multi-level governance & cross-sectoral coordinated strategies for sustainable development
- (7) Increasing the evidence-base of policies
- (8) Encouraging regional differentiation
- (9) Enabling regional marketing approaches for economically viable farming
- (10) Specific measures to support young farmers and new entrants

Each section is split into an overview of the main **issues and findings**, with a selection of the positive and negative examples found in FarmPath research, followed by the **policy recommendations** derived, in order to demonstrate the evidence-base of the recommendations. Although only a limited number of empirical findings are included to exemplify the issues, recommendations were developed on the broader basis of evidence from FarmPath research.

1 Enabling innovation: Building capacities and knowledge infrastructure

ISSUES and FINDINGS:

Individual and collective learning are important mechanisms in the development and uptake of innovations. Potential actors need access to training and education facilities, and to advisory and extension services, that are offering information and knowledge adapted to farmers' needs. The German case studies on the 'Wendland-Elbetal Bio-energy region' and on the 'regional value creation (RWAG, Freiburg)' provide positive examples illustrating the role of learning, and learning infrastructure, in the conceptual **development of innovative initiatives**, as well as in the anchoring phases. The post-graduate studies on corporate law of the RWAG founder stimulated the conceptual development and paved the way for the establishment of RWAG. Similarly, a detailed study of regional energy use and potentials and elaboration of a conversion scenario, as well as an earlier project on 100 municipalities, regions and islands throughout Europe with the objective of a 100% conversion to renewable energy has created openness for the idea of an energy turnaround in the Wendland region. In both initiatives, **learning and knowledge exchange have been institutionalised** – in the form of the Academy for Renewable Energies (AERE) offering Master studies, certificates and seminars in cooperation with the Hamburg University of Applied Science; the Regional energy management agencies (*emma e.V., Klimawerk*) offering advisory services to businesses, municipalities and private households; in form of entrepreneurs' forums for regional value creation (Freiburg) to facilitate learning within the initiative; and as the regional value trust providing advice to regions with an interest in the concept.

In addition to its role in innovation processes, capacities and access to knowledge are limiting factors in the overall viability of farm businesses and their contribution to sustainable development. The lack of knowledge infrastructure and services has been identified as a limiting factor in Bulgaria, Greece and Portugal. Stakeholders in Portugal reported that **the lack of rural and agricultural extension services** are a major handicap in innovation and even just in the definition of strategies for the future ('small-scale farming in Montemor-o-Novo' and 'valuing the Mediterranean wild resources'). In terms of education content sustainability has largely been incorporated in the curricula of universities, however it is still **insufficiently covered in vocational schools**. Furthermore small-scale and young farmers often lack knowledge on the requirements for production in compliance with EU regulations or on the administrative procedures to apply for funding.

A third aspect is the financing and orientation of applied agricultural research and accessibility of findings. It has been identified (particularly in Portugal, but also in other countries) that there is a general **lack of connection between research centres, producers and stakeholders**. The European Innovation Partnership (EIP) is regarded as a potentially useful tool, but a lack of conceptual development in the Member States is observed.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

In order to improve farm and regional-level innovation, national and European funders should:

- Ensure that sufficient **funding** for any knowledge access and transfer activities are available, particularly for those focusing on the sustainability of agriculture.
- Take an active role in improving **facilities for education and training** and the re-establishment, and creation, of accessible **rural extension services**.
- Ensure that the **conditions of funding** require the combination of investment measures with the use of advisory services in order to ensure that investment measures are contributing to sustainability.
- Set up **platforms** that promote communication and connections between research institutes, associations and economic sectors.
- Place higher priorities for **agricultural research** in their strategies, and combine this with active installation and promotion of research services.

2 Enabling cooperation and networking

ISSUES and FINDINGS:

Innovations often arise in actor networks. For example, **agricultural cooperatives** can be beneficial in terms of **joint marketing**, but are facing major and chronic problems such as deficient financial control and auditing (e.g. in Greece); although there is an appropriate institutional framework there are shortcomings in its implementation.

Integrated regional development entails networks including a broad range of diverse actors. **LEADER** is identified as a beneficial framework in terms of **knowledge exchange** and a cooperative **development of (technical, on-farm) innovations** in Bulgaria, Germany and Scotland, UK. In the stakeholder visioning process in the Scottish Aberdeenshire region, LEADER is stated to also have played a role regarding overcoming farms' isolation and societal appreciation of farming lifestyle. There are also positive experiences associated with the currently limited LEADER programme in the Bulgarian case studies on 'new agricultural practices in protected areas' and 'integrating rural tourism and local food production' (Elena municipality).

Due to experiences from the time of collectivism under the socialist regime, **low trust among farmers** has been identified as a hindering factor in the three Czech case studies ('biogas production', Vysočina region; 'new farmers' markets', Plzeň region; 'regional label for quality products', White Carpathians) as well as two of the Bulgarian case studies ('integrating rural tourism and local food production', Elena municipality; 'new agricultural practices in protected areas') and the three stakeholder visions developed in the Pazardjik and Plovdiv region.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

In order to develop broad actor networks:

- Support **integrated regional development** with a long-term planning horizon, sufficient funding and implementation support.
- Provide support for **innovation-oriented clusters** and **innovative cooperation models**.
- Specifically, it is recommended to continue the **support for LEADER-type approaches** toward integrated regional development, and to expand their thematic scope.
- Set up an **institutional framework for farmer cooperation** and ensure adequate **implementation processes** for successful collaboration, e.g. through facilitators.
- Introduce specific measures and incentives for **collaboration** and **auditing** of cooperative enterprises.
- Provide **training for farmers** on cooperative management and governance issues in order to overcome reservations regarding cooperation.
- Fund access to professional **mediators'** and **facilitators'** support for agricultural co-operatives.



Bulgarian Farmers focus group discussion
(Image courtesy of Mariya Peneva, February 2013, Bratsigovo)

3 Reducing the administrative burden on farmers

ISSUES and FINDINGS:

The Bulgarian and Portuguese analyses refer to an **unfavourable organisational setup** and unfavourable advisor-farmer relations. For example, institutional instability caused by frequent changes in ministries and key public bodies' institutional arrangements, as well as a high number of administrative bodies, were identified as hindering factors in all three Portuguese case studies ('small-scale farming' in Montemor-o-Novo, 'collaborating for multifunctionality in the Montado' and 'valuing the Mediterranean wild resources'). A positive organisational model for this is suggested in the visioning process in the Portuguese Montemor-o-Novo region (with 'Loja do Cidadão', being a public office handling diverse general citizen's matters such as taxes, passports, etc.).

As a result of the case study on 'new agricultural practices in protected areas' (Bulgaria) as well as all three Bulgarian stakeholder visions developed in the Pazardjik and Plovdiv region, staff members from national and local administration bodies have been found to have either a very **academic view** of farmers' situations or are not trained in subjects related to farming practice at all, especially with regard to the realities of young and small-scale farmers. This is aggravated by a **negative attitude towards farmers**, as e.g. expressed in the very strict implementation of regulations.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Decrease the administrative burden on farmers through changes to the organisational set up, e.g. through the provision of a **'fast track'**, and set up **'one stop shops'**, for farmers where they may deal with all administrative procedures and receive technical advice.
- Address the issue of unfavourable advisor-farmer relations through the installation of a body of **trusted and knowledgeable long-term staff** in advisory organisations through long-term funding (instead of short term, topic based, advisory projects):
 - Develop a **'helping and coaching culture'** by providing training to advisors on practical farming issues.
 - Ensure a **clear distinction** between advice provision and regulatory bodies.



4 Enabling environment-friendly and resource-efficient farming

ISSUES and FINDINGS:

The relevance of considering the **impact of farming** (i.e. unintended side effects) is highlighted in FarmPath research as an issue related to the ecological dimension of agricultural sustainability, but at the same time pointing to the need for an integration of all **three sustainability dimensions** in business valuation. A positive example of this can be derived from the case study on 'regional value creation' (Freiburg, Germany), where corresponding evaluation criteria are applied to all partner businesses along the regional value-added chain. In contrast, in the case study on 'collective action to reduce green algae' (Brittany, France) the linkage of farming practices and negative environmental impacts was refuted by mainstream organisations for a long time, leading to insufficient measures being adopted which did not sufficiently reduce the algae problem.

Ongoing **incentives provided through policy support** for managing farms in ways that are harmful to the environment have also been identified. For instance, in the case study on 'collaborating for multifunctionality in the Montado' (Portugal) it became apparent that the coupled headage payment at regional level has stimulated the increase of livestock density and the replacement of sheep by cattle, with a negative impact on the Montado system. In the three initiatives studied in the high nature value farming (HNVF) cluster, agri-environmental measures (AEM) and financial support as key drivers have created a **heightened awareness of the value of nature conservation** among farmers and the local population, as well as NGOs and administration, e.g. and in the French case ('landscape management in the St Amarin Valley') this came from new entrants beginning to farm on uncultivated land.



The Montado landscape in the Alentejo region, Portugal (Image courtesy of Filipe Barroso, University of Evora, 2012, Montemor-o-Novo)

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Recognise and develop measures to counter the environmental impacts of economic policies:

- Improve, through training and advice, the **knowledge base of farmers** about externalities in terms of control, monitoring, and sanctions.
- Develop and require the application of **realisable farm accounting systems** that include valid and litigable criteria for the judgement of environmental and social aspects.
- Involve European and national policy makers, farmers' associations, agencies in charge of national farm accountancy systems as well as banks, in the implementation of activities.
- Provide income **instead of cost recovery** (combination of AEM with incentives provided by the market; e.g. in the German case study on 'ground water protection through organic farming in the Mangfall valley', an additional payment by municipal authorities serves as a conversion incentive for farmers).
- Create a more flexible **co-financing system** provided by EU member states and regions in order to make it more attractive to offer corresponding measures.
- **Reduce** existing incentives for developments that are harmful to the environment.
- Develop a more effective **ex-ante impact assessment** of the new CAP and rural development measures.

5 Improving the image of agriculture and rural life in society

ISSUES and FINDINGS:

Low legitimacy of agricultural policy and public spending, as well as a **low prestige of farming**, were identified in the Czech and German stakeholder visions from the Plzeň and Freiburg regions. This is associated with poor external relations of farmers, whether inter-farm cooperation or other contacts outside agriculture, that might contribute to positive farmer self-identity. This issue is related to the **valuation of non-commodity outputs** and achievements, as well as marketable products provided by agriculture.

From the perspective of many farmers, and other rural actors, agriculture does not receive adequate attention from official policies, and as a result working in agriculture is not considered prestigious. This fact creates a significant social barrier for new entrants (see section 10), especially when it is combined with the prospect of low farming income. This issue was raised during the visioning process (e.g. in Czech Republic and Scotland).

Particularly for studies in Bulgaria and Greece (visioning process in the Imathia region) the issue of **poor technical** (mostly roads, irrigation) and **social infrastructure** (schools, medical care) in rural areas is highlighted. For example, the three Bulgarian case studies ('new agricultural practices in protected areas'; 'integrating rural tourism and local food production', Elena municipality; 'sustainable rural lifestyle', Zhelen) as well as all three stakeholder visions developed in the Pazardjik and Plovdiv region demonstrate that local schools, kindergartens and health care services are in poor condition, including permanent closure of such facilities, often due to poor economic performance without any assessment of the social effects.

Related to **regionally sustainable agriculture** is the idea of an integrated rural development. The interrelation between various aspects including public health, climate, lack of **employment** and an **ageing rural population** arose as an issue from a range of study regions in the FarmPath countries. Not least, keeping the population, but also maintaining business activity, is a precondition for viable rural areas. As far as agricultural businesses are concerned, ensuring farm succession – and as a result the role of **young farmers** and **new entrants** – plays a vital role.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Improve **communication** about agriculture and farmers' roles in rural areas, e.g. through funding agricultural shows or engagement in schools, thus maintaining the perspective of farming are key for the economic, environmental and social sustainability of rural areas in Europe.
- Enhance the recognition of agriculture in society as a valued and important occupation by **legitimizing public policy support**, e.g. through campaigns, training and advice, and improve communication between public administration and citizens.
- Expand the **school curricula** (e.g. on-farm learning experiences for children and youths), so as to provide a corresponding increase of financial resources.
- Prioritize **rural infrastructure** on the basis of actual needs (e.g. roads, water-efficient irrigation infrastructure, sustainable and smart grids, and agricultural waste management; Bulgarian and Greek visioning process in the Pazardjik and Plovdiv as well as Imathia regions).
- Ensure **prior assessment** of all social, economic and environmental effects of closing rural services and infrastructures, e.g. medical services, schools etc., and consider rearrangement and creative solutions to fit local people's needs.

6 Multi-level governance & cross-sectoral coordinated strategies for sustainable development

ISSUES and FINDINGS:

According to Kemp and Martens (2007)² transitions are associated with fundamental changes in functional systems involving multiple sectors and a range of societal actors at various levels. A broad issue arising from a range of case studies throughout the FarmPath countries is a lack of effective **multi-level governance and cross-sectoral coordination** of strategies and policies (identified in Bulgaria, Greece, Portugal and Scotland). This lack does not allow for the regional sustainability of agriculture, which depends on an integrated approach. The national desktop policy analysis for Bulgaria, as well as the three visions developed together with stakeholders in the Pazardjik and Plovdiv region, reveal that sectoral policies are still prevalent in the policy measures implemented in rural areas, uncoordinated with local-level structures. Likewise in the visioning process in the Greek Imathia study region, **inconsistency** and **discontinuity** of the institutional framework and policies are identified.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Enable cross-sectoral and cross-level coordination of strategies, policies, programmes and measures
- Reduce **conflicting goals** and **trade-offs** within such approaches. Renewable energy production in the agricultural sector provides a prominent illustration for such conflicts as it appears, from the 'Renewable Energy Production' cluster case studies carried out in Czech Republic, Germany and Scotland, that the sustainability impact has only been considered in a fragmented manner without an integrated perspective of all dimensions of sustainability. For instance, the ecological impacts of renewable energy production were largely neglected, resulting in increasing land consumption and monocultures associated with energy crop cultivation. However, renewable energy production, through its dependence on support and corresponding vulnerability to policy changes, has also proven to be at risk of being economically unsustainable.
- As a more general recommendation addressed to national ministries, regarding **regionally sustainable agriculture**, it is proposed to connect agricultural issues to a more **transversal policy** (water management quality, environment and natural resources, food models etc.) and the related broad range of stakeholders in the future Common Agricultural Policy.



Greek visioning process- focus group
(Image courtesy of Emi Tsakalou, March 2013, Venia)

² Kemp R. and Martens P. (2007) Sustainable development: How to manage something that is subjective and never can be achieved? Sustainability: Science, Practice & Policy 3: 5–14.

7 Increasing the evidence-base of policies

ISSUES and FINDINGS:

Issues related to **monitoring and evaluation** are mentioned in the analyses from a range of FarmPath countries (Bulgaria, Germany, Greece, Portugal, and Scotland). The main aspects identified in the research are an **unbalanced orientation of policies and actions** regarding the various dimensions of sustainability, a lack of **evidence-based policy making and adaptability**, as well as difficulties in the evaluation and monitoring of **policy outcomes**. For instance, bio-energy strategies were implemented without an ex-ante assessment of the longer-term sustainability impact of the expansion of related technologies and practices, e.g. on the ecological dimension regarding land consumption through increased cultivation of energy crops (case studies on 'biogas production', Czech Republic and 'Wendland-Elbetal Bio-energy region', Germany).

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Regional and local conditions should be considered in policy design and implementation:

- Develop a **coordinated cross-level and consistent cross-sectoral framework** of national policy visions as well as regional and local strategies and measures.
- With regard to **strategic goals** at various policy levels (e.g. agri-renewables strategy), create a longer term political vision based on an integrated ex-ante (sustainability) impact assessment and regional pilot projects (e.g. as set up in the Scottish Land Use Strategy to implement mechanisms for the stronger integration of rural, regional and sectoral policy design).
- In the **targeting of support** for renewable energy production, the agricultural sector, but also broader rural development potential should be taken into consideration, removing the bias towards corporate operators. In the past, quantitative targets (for shares of renewable energies) were set and pursued without considering (in sustainability terms) the process and actors involved in their attainment.

- The strategic goals set at various levels should be implemented in a better coordinated manner. National- and regional-level **platforms for institutional exchange** are proposed in order to solve goal conflicts.
- Regarding monitoring and evaluation, recommendations include a careful **ex-ante impact assessment**, **effective monitoring** as well as **flexible fine-tuning** over time. Measures initiated by higher (i.e. EU, national) levels should be made subject to an assessment of their lower-level (regional, local) impacts (using relevant regional- and local-level criteria).
- Monitoring and evaluation of the existing policy and strategies should focus on **processes and outcomes**, consistently linked with sustainability objectives. More measures with **result-based payments** should be introduced, ensuring a multi-dimensional sustainability perspective.



Final Portuguese pathways workshop
(Image courtesy of Anne Poininet de Sivry, May 2013, Montemor-o-Novo)

8 Encouraging regional differentiation

ISSUES and FINDINGS:

Associated with this issue, a **lack of differentiation** between the regional and local levels, as well as the absence of measures which would allow for their specific conditions and needs to be met, is identified in the FarmPath country analyses (e.g. Bulgaria, Czech Republic, France, Greece, Portugal, and Scotland). A positive example of **regionalisation and policy integration** from the Scottish desktop policy analysis are Land Use Pilot Projects (initiated in 2013 by the Aberdeenshire and Scottish Borders Councils, UK), i.e. a framework using an ecosystems approach to consider existing and future regional land use in an integrated way, including agriculture, forestry, peatland restoration, water environment, habitat management, etc. The case study on 'collaborating for multifunctionality in the Montado silvo-pastoral system' (Portugal) demonstrates that policy adaptability is easier to realise at the regional and local levels where public actors are more open towards the specificities of the Montado system and the approach to multifunctionality.

Participatory approaches were found to be underdeveloped throughout the policy cycle, i.e. design, implementation and evaluation (Greek and Portuguese desktop policy analyses), and were discussed regarding their up- and down- sides in FarmPath analyses. As a positive example, in France, the practical implementation of rules related to high nature value farming (HNVF) is shaped as a bottom-up approach. Here, the policy aimed at maintaining open landscape and mountainous agriculture in the Vosges (case study on 'landscape management in the St Amarin Valley') has been efficiently implemented as a local and regional agri-environmental measure steered by a partnership between farmers, NGOs, as well as local and regional authorities.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Recommendations mentioned in section 6, 'Multi-level governance & cross-sectoral coordinated strategies for sustainable development' are particularly relevant here. In addition:

- Take into account **regional and local conditions** in policy design and implementation.
- Create a favourable environment for stimulating lower-level movement, through promoting and enhancing **effective participatory approaches** engaging local and regional actors, e.g. in the design of strategies, programmes and measures.



The Montado in Alentejo in the summer, Portugal
(Image courtesy of Filipe Barroso, University of Evora, 2009, Almodóvar)

9 Enabling regional marketing approaches for economically viable farming

ISSUES and FINDINGS:

An unfavourable marketing situation for agricultural products emerges from FarmPath research as an issue. Reasons named are **lack of consumers' information and trust** in the quality of regional and local products (e.g. stakeholder visions developed in the Greek Imathia region). Another example can be found in Portugal, where a lack of strategic promotion of the Montemor-o-Novo study region has been identified, particularly regarding the regional 'Montado' system. As a finding from the case study on 'new agricultural practices in protected areas' (Bulgaria) it has been highlighted that **marketing channels for local products** are often very limited due to the variation in the quality and quantity of the products which is a hindering factor, especially for small-scale and young farmers to access conventional supply chains.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Foster consistent **marketing strategies** that promote the regional features as well as quality and diversity of regional products, involving professionals' and consumers' organisations, collective farmers' marketing initiatives, research, and NGOs.
- Within the above-named strategies, set up **regional brands**, including regulations for the related certification processes.
- In order to improve **consumer-producer relations**, initiate training and awareness campaigns sensitizing consumers to regional specificities (e.g. on-farm visits for schools).
- In order to increase producers' marketing skills, training and advice should be provided (e.g. on improving the promotion of their products in direct sales as well as on communicating with consumers).
- As a means to increase **value-added** and foster **short supply chains**, set up e.g. farmers' markets allowing for direct producer-consumer contact; provide investment support for farmers to meet the official and marketing requirements for direct sales; and improve the existing ordinance on direct sales of products of animal origin in order to reflect the realities of small farms better.



10 Specific measures to support young farmers and new entrants

ISSUES and FINDINGS:

At present, Eurostat surveys and European policies designed to support young farmers and new entrants assume that the two terms are synonymous. FarmPath research has revealed the need to **distinguish** between 'young farmers' and 'new entrants', who start by (1) inheriting a holding within a family, (2) establishing a new business, or (3) acquiring a holding from a retiring farmer. Each of these ways has its own specific needs. As a related issue, there are several different definitions of young farmers as well as new entrants in EU statistics and policies, and individual member states. Available statistical evidence on the situation of young farmers and new entrants is not systematic and many aspects (such as gender) are neglected.

The main precondition for entering agriculture is the **economic viability** of a holding. The majority of young farmers in Europe operate farms belonging to the smallest size category. Economic sustainability of farms can be enhanced by **support for small farms** held by young farmers and new entrants and a **diversification of activities**. FarmPath research demonstrates that young farmers and new entrants are particularly active in the case study initiatives on developing alternative food marketing channels. Their relatively high participation is due to the fact that this niche managed to add value to farm production (using a combination of food processing, local certification schemes and direct sales).

FarmPath research shows that the **image of agriculture in society** needs to be improved. The low prestige of agriculture creates a significant social barrier for new entrants, especially when it is combined with the prospect of low farming income. This issue was raised during the visioning process (e.g. in Czech Republic and Scotland).

The young farmers' visions developed in study regions (e.g. in Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Greece, Portugal and Scotland) created evidence that young farmers have a need to **improve their education**. Literature reviews indicated that young farmers and new entrants are more inclined to use new technology than other groups of farmers.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The situation and roles of young farmers and new entrants in agriculture should be supported through:

- Strategic documents which need to **distinguish** between young farmers and new entrants, and adjust their goals with regard to the roles of these two groups and their needs. National-level structural surveys should look at young people in agriculture from a more general perspective (i.e. including successors).
- Further **research** is needed to clarify the role of young people in sustainable development, e.g. regarding their inclination towards using innovative technologies.
- Changing the situation of young farmers' and new entrants' low representation as holders of larger farms would require enabling **access to land**, or secure tenure, e.g. through the establishment of land trusts.
- Support for small farms held by young farmers and any type of new entrant should either (a) directly improve their **income** from farming through payment schemes, or (b) support **diversification** of farms and part-time farming.
- Improve **communication** about agriculture and farmers' roles in rural areas in terms of recognition in society, thus maintaining farming as a key for the economic, environmental and social sustainability of rural areas in Europe.
- **Education** should be enhanced, particularly in areas of **new technology, environment and business skills**, which have been considered to be useful in the eyes of young farmers and new entrants.



Project identity

The FarmPath project (Grant no. 265394) is funded by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Research within the 7th Framework Programme's thematic field 'European Knowledge Based Bio-Economy'. It is being implemented between March 2011 and May 2014.

Further information on the FarmPath project can be found at www.farmpath.eu

The FarmPath consortium

This document is the result of the collaborative work of nine European research institutions in eight countries. Empirical field work has been conducted in seven of the countries:



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