

EISA/FNL Farmers Exchange
“The CAP Leading to Sustainability
in Agriculture:
Farmers Communicate with the
Public”

3–6 September 2008, Lower Saxony, Germany



European Commission strengthens role of Integrated Farming

Transparent information on agricultural policies on EU level is crucial

(FNL) Hildesheim 4./5. September: Forty-five agricultural experts from eight EU countries met in Hildesheim last week to discuss solutions for current problems with regard to information and communication about agriculture as well as latest developments in the agricultural sector itself. At this event, the European Commission particularly encouraged the role of Integrated Farming. Dr Martin Scheele of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development said during the panel discussion in the course of the EISA Farmers Exchange: "When looking at the challenges connected to securing food supply for the world, Integrated Farming attains an ever growing importance". And: "The EISA network of demonstration farms provides an excellent platform to inform the public in Europe about sustainable agriculture and the Common Agricultural Policy"

It is the aim of EISA and the European Commission to establish associations, (similar to the Association for the Promotion of Sustainable Agriculture e.V. (FNL) in Germany and the other national EISA members) which encourage the further development of Integrated Farming and raise public awareness of sustainable agriculture. This year the EISA Farmers Exchange was co-financed by the EU-Commission for the first time. As well as looking at Integrated Farming, nature, soil and water protection, bio-energy, responsible animal husbandry and sugar production/sugar market, the event also focused on the question of how the public can be informed about the Common Agricultural Policy and its implementation on farms throughout the EU.

The EISA board was represented by the chairman Tony Worth from the United Kingdom and the two vice-chairmen Heinrich Kemper MdL (Germany) and Gerard Marmasse (France) at the two days event.

Going East

Following the successful Farmers Exchange in Sweden in 2004 and subsequent field trips in the following years to France, Luxemburg and the United Kingdom, the 2008 EISA Farmers Exchange stayed abreast of EU enlargement: For the first time, farmers and representatives of agricultural organisations from Poland, Hungary and Czech Republic took part in the event.

Price booster EU?

Initiated by the national EISA member Fördergemeinschaft Nachhaltige Landwirtschaft e.V. (FNL), a press breakfast was organised on 5th September as part of this years programme. Discussions with the press addressed the question of whether EU policies lead to rising food prices. Participants judged this issue quite controversial. Whereas Udo Hemmerling of the German Farmers Union and Dr Martin Scheele were sure that no price boosting effect of European policies would be seen, Dr Gibfried Schenk from FNL, the EISA chairman Tony Worth and particularly Claudia Michel from the European Crop Protection Association (ECPA) in Brussels referred to developments which, already in the short term, may endanger

price stability within the EU. According to their estimation, it was essential to drastically increase production efficiency on the agricultural land used at present – on the world-wide scale as well as in Europe and Germany. “As soon as the new legislation on crop protection currently being discussed in Brussels and Strassburg leads to the phasing out of many active ingredients of pesticides, crops cannot be adequately protected against pests and diseases any longer. However, a lack of protection is synonymous to increasing losses with regard to quality and quantity – and this effect will inevitably affect prices which consumers will ultimately pay for in their food bills,” said Claudia Michel.

Common Agricultural Policy: transparency and information are crucial

During the panel discussion on 4th September, panellists discussed how far EU citizens are still able to follow and understand the aims and the instruments of the Common Agricultural Policy. Dr Martin Scheele summarised the Commission’s point of view as follows: “Let me put it this way: I do not understand what makes my car function, but I trust that it does its job properly by taking me from one place to another.” The European Commission would be hoping for a similar level of trust among EU citizens, who may not be interested in the precise details of the CAP, Dr Scheele said.

In spite of this clear statement, Dr Scheele as well as the other panellists, Clemens Neumann of the Federal Ministry for Food, Agriculture and Consumer Protection, Jörn Dwehus of the Farmers Union Lower Saxony, and EISA Chairman Tony Worth made it clear that Brussels seems to have a communication problem: Even today, there is a common misconception amongst the public, based largely on images that persist from the 1970’s and 1980’s, that surplus food continues to be produced, dumped and destroyed. The decoupling of farm payments from production would have eliminated the incentives for surplus production, however, most members of the public were completely unaware of this development.

Broad spectrum of farms

On-farm visits were yet another important part of the Farmers Exchange. The first farm visited on 4th September was the Ostmeyer family farm in Laatzen close to Hanover. The farm is located on the border of the FFH-area “Leineaue zwischen Hannover und Ruthe”, and farming practices therefore have to be particularly focused on nature, soil and water protection. The farmer Karl-Heinrich Ostmeyer explained clearly the legal framework for his activities, and how he has taken care of these issues by implementing Integrated Farming in his business.

The group then visited the biogas plant Algermissen which also proved to be a very interesting location. Dirk Ernst, manager of the biogas plant and one of the five cooperating farmers who own the plant, provided deep insights into the political framework and the conditions for grants, the positive effects of biogas production on the cropping sequence and the efficient operation of the biogas plant itself.

On 5th September, responsible animal husbandry was the key issue of the exchange programme. In the Research and Teaching Station Ruthe of the Veterinary University of Hanover (TiHo) Dr Gerhard Greif, president of the TiHo, Dr. Andreas Briese, Institute for Animal Hygiene, Animal Protection and Animal Ethology, and Dr. Christian Sürrie of the Research and Teaching Station Ruthe informed the group about different aspects of animal husbandry. First of all, European regulations and their national implementation were characterised and then the exemplary stables and housing conditions were demonstrated and explained. The group’s last visit was to the sugar factory in Nordstemmen

EISA

The European Initiative for Sustainable Development in Agriculture (EISA) was founded with the common aim of developing and promoting Integrated Farming throughout Europe. Integrated Farming is a sustainable system which helps farmers improve the way they farm

for the benefit of the environment, the profitability of their business and social responsibility, all important aspects of sustainable development.

EISA members are national associations which speak out for the societal understanding for agriculture in Austria, Germany, France, Luxemburg, Sweden and the United Kingdom with a network of demonstration farms. This helps to establish contacts between producers and consumers and it helps to raise awareness of how farmers are working in harmony with nature to produce good food and renewable resources with environmental and social care.

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