

Agriculture

In response to the commitments made at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development ("Earth Summit", Rio, June 1992), France elaborated a **national sustainable development strategy**¹ in 2003. It includes a specific chapter on agriculture and fisheries, comprising the following objectives:

- implement the agriculture action plan included in the national biodiversity strategy (adopted in 2004) ;
- encourage the new sustainable agriculture development patterns;
- foster sustainable development programmes in the various sectors;
- ensure that the producer receives a portion of the added value generated by these approaches;
- better accommodate agricultural externalities;
- promote sustainable rural development;
- tighten existing monitoring, control and health inspection systems.

Already strongly involved in the current national sustainable development strategy, the Ministry for Agriculture and Fisheries (MAP) decided to test an integrated strategic discussion approach leading ultimately to the formulation of a **ministerial sustainable development strategy**. The definition of the strategic framework, the first stage of the approach, was completed at the end of December 2006. Seven strategic goals were identified:

- respond to the challenges of climate change;
- ensure implementation of best practices contributing to the safety of consumers and the quality of the environment;
- promote the elaboration and development of voluntary sustainable production, marketing and consumption programmes;
- support a focus on sustainable development in research, education and development;
- support sustainable regional development;
- promote sustainable development in agriculture, forestry and fisheries at Community and international level;
- adapt modes of governance.

This work is carried out through:

- definition of concrete actions and results indicators by the relevant departments;
- management of the approach in the departments of the Ministry for Agriculture and Fisheries, with a particular focus on environmental responsibility;
- deployment of the strategy through appropriate approaches and methods in the decentralised departments of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries and in public establishments (especially the agricultural education).

Food safety policy

Protecting public health is a central focus of the administration. Food safety is a crucial aspect of this effort. Three ministries are jointly responsible for it – the ministries in charge of agriculture, health and consumer affairs. Within the ministry in charge of agriculture, this responsibility is vested in the *Direction Générale de l'Alimentation* (DGAL) (general directorate for food) and covers the entire chain from production of products through all stages of food processing to final delivery to the consumer.

Compared to other Western countries and, at national level, compared to other human health risks (traffic accidents, tobacco, alcohol, etc.) food safety control by the industry and the public authorities can be said to be satisfactory in France. Crises and alerts are perhaps now more frequent than previously, but this is primarily a reflection of closer monitoring (particularly thanks to the national and European warning systems) and greater public awareness of these issues.

Thus, the DGAL regulates health inspections of animal raw materials and establishments producing and processing animal-based food for human consumption, and it administers the health approvals of these establishments. It formulates health regulations covering the

¹ See the section devoted to this topic in the cross-cutting themes.

transport and distribution of foodstuffs as well as catering. To implement this public health policy, the DGAL works through departmental veterinary services directorates. Reporting to the Prefect, the 4,600 employees of these directorates perform day-to-day health and safety tasks involving animal-based foodstuffs and foodstuffs of animal origin.

In addition, the French food safety policy is part of the European context. From the start, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) covered safety issues relating to agricultural production (crops), livestock production and fisheries, as well as the products derived from their processing. To apply this legislation, the European Union has a coherent set of specialized institutions.

Policies and programmes aimed at increasing farm incomes and agricultural productivity

Since its inception, the CAP has undergone steady change, moving toward more efficient ways of transferring income via direct payments. The Luxembourg compromise and the introduction of total or partial decoupling have improved the efficiency of income transfer.

The Agenda 2000 reform led to a marked approximation of the amount of direct aid paid to producers of cereals, oilseed and legumes and aid paid to "bovines, meat" producers. Of 1.2 billion euros in additional direct aid provided under Agenda 2000, 73% represents increased aid to bovines and only 25% increased direct aid to cereals. This reform therefore generates support and hence income inequalities between the activities.

Finally, the CAP is not limited to aid to producers. Rural development aid, introduced in the Berlin agreement and then strengthened by the Luxembourg compromise, enables farmers operating in difficult regions to improve their income. This is the case of the natural handicap compensatory allowances (ICHN) awarded in particular in mountain areas to compensate for difficulties not experienced in lowlands (smaller farm size, slopes, etc.).

Policies and laws aimed at guaranteeing farming rights and security of land tenure and water use

Access to agricultural land for the purpose of farming can take the form of full ownership acquired by donation, inheritance, or purchase on the land market. But it can also take the form of leasing.

Tenant status, governed by public policy, is a form of farming in which the farmer pays an annual fee to the owner of the land. This status governs the terms of the lease and ensures that the farmer who has leased the land has a sound guarantee that he will be able to farm it over a lengthy period for a moderate rent subject to regulation by the public authorities. Thus, without devoting their financial resources to the purchase of land, French farmers are nevertheless given a guarantee that they can exercise their profession, and this enables them to use these financial resources to acquire and modernise operating assets. This context, which favours tenant farmers, explains the fact that in France, over 60% of the land, a large and growing proportion of the total, is leased to tenants.

Last but not least there is a "structural control" mechanism, which consists in subjecting the acquisition of agricultural land to a prior authorization procedure. Structural control is a major tool for regulating access to land and providing installation aid to young farmers.

Local and indigenous methods aimed at ensuring ecologically rational food production

France wishes to conserve indigenous agricultural know-how and practice. In particular, it promotes the growing of perfume, aromatic and medicinal plants in overseas France (essentially vanilla, coffee, geranium, vetiver and ylang-ylang). A variety of actions have been taken with regard to these practices, in particular a review of the use of traditional knowledge.

Prevention and management of health and plant health risks

Many actions are conducted to prevent and manage health and plant health risks inherent in plant production. The plant protection services of the Ministry for Agriculture and Fisheries are responsible for health and plant health monitoring as well as the overseeing plant production

conditions. This monitoring ensures early detection of organisms harmful to plants and makes it possible to take steps to eradicate the organisms concerned or keep them within acceptable limits via a farmer warning system.

Crop systems employing reduced amounts of plant protection products are also developed, following the principles of integrated protection systems (crop rotation, individual crop management plans, integrated treatment, etc.). References are also already available, particularly for field crops, and a prospective study of crop systems using reduced inputs was launched in 2007. The results are expected in 2009 and will be accompanied by a proposal for setting up a network to collect references, perform experiments and disseminate more economical practices.

Financial incentives to develop these systems are offered in the agri-environmental measures of the French rural development programme for the period 2007-2013. They aim in particular to remove training and support related impediments to adoption of such systems. These incentives are subject to a specification setting out performance (reduction in the use of plant health products) rather than best endeavour (use of an alternative technique) requirements. Indeed, integrated production is based on a combination of partly effective agronomic solutions tailored to the context of each farm, which are difficult to monitor.

Measures to improve water management in agriculture; measures aimed at using energy and other essential inputs more rationally and efficiently so as to achieve sustainable agricultural production

The Ministry for Agriculture and Fisheries provides financial support to agricultural investments aimed at improving water distribution and transfer networks, as well as investments in irrigation water storage facilities. Priority is given to construction of retention basins so as to reduce withdrawals during the low-water period. Beyond these collective water facilities, incentives can be offered to farmers under the French 2007-2013 rural development programme. These would include, for example, agri-environmental incentives to switch from irrigated to dry crops and the *plan végétal pour l'environnement* (plant plan for the environment) aimed at improving individual irrigation equipment in order to avoid waste (drop-by-drop irrigation).

Moreover, a variety of European and national policies promote better quantitative management of water resources. Prefectoral framework decrees defining irrigation restrictions and their thresholds enable farmers to plan for periods of drought by changing their crop rotation or planting dates. The law on water and aquatic environments of 30 December 2006 includes several provisions relating to quantitative water management. It aims, in particular, at fostering collective management of irrigation water in zones suffering from a chronic water shortage and at encouraging more economical use of water through payment of an irrigation fee pegged to water availability. Water rates are one way to regulate consumption. However, the price of water for irrigation effectively paid by the farmer can vary widely depending on whether he withdraws it directly, belongs to a collective irrigation management structure or buys his water from a regional development company or a water distribution network operator. Last but not least, improved knowledge of water-saving crops and agricultural practices should make it possible to prepare for the consequences of climate change on water scarcity.

With regard to farm energy consumption, measures aimed at improving energy performance are under consideration in the context of the Grenelle Environment Forum, a broad national debate on the direction of French environmental policy (energy savings and production of renewable energies).

Infrastructure reinforcement and development measures aimed at improving market distribution

To pool the means of production and organize supply, particularly in view of the concentration of downstream industry, the agricultural sector has acquired a specific form of enterprise, the cooperative, and also producer organizations.

The cooperative, the first form of organization specific to the agricultural sector, developed after the Second World War. This type of organization ensured that restructuring did not

benefit only large agricultural undertakings and integrated companies. Agricultural cooperatives enjoy a sui generis status governed by the rural code and their operation is geared to the individual member. There are 3,500 cooperatives in France, to which must be added the 13,000 farm machinery cooperatives (CUMA) that pool agricultural equipment. The framework law on agriculture of 6 January 2006 established the *Haut Conseil de la Coopération Agricole* (HCCA) (high council on agricultural cooperatives). This gives agricultural cooperatives a single independent body responsible for helping to formulate their strategic guidelines.

Producer organizations (OP) were set up in the 1960s by producers for the purpose of ensuring discipline in operation, production and marketing in the wake of sales-related troubles in the fruit and vegetable sector.

The producer organizations serve the primary purpose of organizing production (particularly with respect to quality, traceability, promotion of methods that respect the environment), ensuring marketing discipline, regulating prices and guiding the action of their members in accordance with market requirements. They can be "encouraged" through provision of "reserved aids" - national (livestock buildings) and European (fruit and vegetable sector) aid. They must be recognized by the public authorities (ministry responsible for agriculture). In the fresh fruit and vegetable sector, the producer organizations are particularly numerous (approximately 300). Indeed, the forming of producer organizations is a sine qua non for receiving community funds. In addition, this sector has developed a second level of economic organization: the *comités de bassin*, (basin committees). They have the task of coordinating production (volume) data, enforcing certain production, packaging and presentation rules and implementing actions benefiting all producers in the basin (promotion, applied research, collective management of funds and operational producer programmes).

Conclusion of bilateral, regional and multilateral agreements on the liberalization of markets for agricultural products, including the Doha Development Round (WTO)

In its trade policy with developing countries the European Union makes a point of including a sustainable development dimension. This is sometimes limited by the legal framework set by the WTO (very strict rules concerning the granting of trade advantages to a limited number of countries, etc.). Moreover, it may meet with opposition from certain trading partners. This applies in particular to the "social and environmental standards" that the EU and France would like to include in the Doha Round negotiations.

As part of the unilateral trade preference regime designed for developing countries (Generalised System of Preferences GSP), developing countries that ratify or undertake to ratify a certain number of conventions relating to Human Rights and labour rights, the environment and good governance (combating drug trafficking, etc.) are given an additional trade preference - the special regime to encourage sustainable development and good governance or "GSP+".

Development of organic farming in France

The dynamism of organic farming is a major sustainable development goal in French agriculture. France has set up a number of policies to develop organic farming.

The framework law on agriculture and the organic farming tax credit.

The *framework law on agriculture* of 5 January 2006 provides for a specific tax incentive for organic farmers: organic farms receive a tax credit for the three years 2005, 2006 and 2007.

Specific support under the 2007-2013 national strategic plan

In the period 2007-2013, farms engaging in organic production may receive support from the ERDF, the European Regional Development Fund, as so-called territorial agri-environmental measures (AEM). The AEM for organic farming will be made up of two distinct measures, one to support conversion and another, recently introduced, to support maintenance.

Support included in "quality" measures of the rural development programme (PDRH)

A first measure aims to encourage farmer participation in food quality regimes, including organic farming, by supporting fixed costs (cost of the certification inspections, for example). The second measure consists in supporting information and promotion activities for products covered by food quality regimes.

Organizing credits for organic farming.

The development of organic farming also involves the funding of activities aimed at enabling the sector to organize by facilitating relations among the various actors. Funds amounting to 2.7 million euros target actions to foster the structuring of the organic food sector, with priority focus on the downstream sector.

The *Agence française pour le Développement et la Promotion de l'Agriculture Biologique* (French Agency for the Development and Promotion of Organic Farming ("Organic Agency"), legally established as a public interest group (GIP), is responsible for promoting dialogue within the sector and defining guidelines and actions (with a focus on communication) to permit balanced development of the sector.

All these instruments will be reinforced in the *Plan d'Action Agriculture Biologique 2012* (2012 organic farming action plan) announced by the Ministry for Agriculture and Fisheries.

Protection against climate risks

The State acts to protect against climate risks under a law that sets out a guarantee regime against agricultural disasters. This law organizes protection policy with two-fold purpose: developing insurance and compensating farmers suffering a disaster, defined as a non-insurable loss on an exceptional scale due to a natural agent against which usual techniques provide no protection.

In addition, the State pays part of the premium or contribution for a crop insurance policy, a product offered by insurance companies since 2005 (multi-risk, multi-product policy, by crop or by farm). These new insurance policies cover most losses due to climate: those due to hail, wind, frost, drought, flooding or excessive rainfall are subsidized by the State. They can be taken out for all types of crops except feed crops.

In addition, farmers may deduct from their profits a sum to be used to acquire or create amortizable fixed assets or to create an ad hoc savings account to cover future investments or unforeseen (climate, economic, health or family) events.

Research – training – development policy

The action plan implementing the fourth goal of the ministerial sustainable development strategy ("support a focus on sustainable development in research, education and development") takes broad inspiration from the experience gleaned in the period 2000-2006 as part of the *Programme National Agriculture Durable, Développement Durable* (PNADDD) (national sustainable agriculture, sustainable development programme) implemented in agricultural technical training schools. Technical tools, such as the IDEA² indicators set up with INRA (National Institute for Agronomic Research) and several technical institutes, provide a protocol for measuring a farm's involvement in sustainable development. In addition, work carried out in some thirty agricultural schools has been described in a book published by Educagri, *L'enseignement agricole en marche vers le développement durable : formation et éducation, actions quotidiennes, projets d'établissement* (agricultural training moving toward sustainable development: training and education, day-to-day activities, school projects).

Over the same period, special attention was paid to sustainable development in the content of calls for proposal financed by the agricultural and rural development special account. The same

² **IDEA: indicateurs de durabilité des exploitations agricoles (farm sustainability indicators)**; a diagnostic tool based on quantitative indicators that includes an agricultural-ecological, a social-regional and an economic scale and is used to assess the strengths and weaknesses of production systems and to identify improvements leading to greater sustainability.

is true for the elaboration of agricultural and rural development programmes of the chambers of agriculture/standing assembly of chambers of agriculture and the agricultural technical institutes: programmes are focused on sustainable development and research and innovation are mobilized to pursue it. The objective is to propose agricultural systems and practices fostering sustainable development in agricultural and food processing sectors.

The primary purpose of agriculture is to meet the food needs of the population. Climate change, with its uncertainty and rapid pace, places new responsibilities on all agricultural systems in the world to adapt, diversify and contribute to reducing global greenhouse gas emissions: in France, the proportion of GHGs emitted by agriculture is 19%. In addition, intensive production processes constitute a risk for environments, threatening the sustainability of agriculture itself.

Beyond major changes in agricultural practice, a move is under way to transform agriculture itself, revisiting the basis on which conventional agriculture is practiced so as to reconcile the need for volume production, economic efficiency, adaptation to climate change and ecological realism. The pursuit of projects initiated by the ministerial sustainable development strategy should result in the introduction (and monitoring) of actions involving strong mobilization of actors and in particular of agricultural educators.