

A Response by www.ukagriculture.com to

"A Vision for the Common Agricultural Policy" published by H M Treasury and Defra, December 2005

"A Vision for the Common Agricultural Policy" (CAP) was published in December 2005 and sets out a vision for the future of the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy. The document states that its aim is to stimulate debate.

The document defines its vision for agriculture within the next 15 years, stating that it should be:

1. internationally competitive without reliance on subsidy or protection;
2. rewarded by the market for its outputs, not least safe and good quality food, and by the taxpayer only for producing societal benefits that the market cannot deliver;
3. environmentally-sensitive, maintaining and enhancing landscape and wildlife and tackling pollution;
4. socially responsive to the needs of rural communities;
5. producing to high levels of animal health and welfare; and
6. non-distorting of international trade and the world economy.

The document then goes on to support in more depth the thinking behind its analysis.

When we first saw the title of the report and read the first page of the Executive Summary we had high hopes that the document would be forward looking and in a genuine sense, visionary. Alas it quickly became clear that the analysis was deeply flawed and that the document had failed to address some of the most important issues of our time.

European agriculture is a major player in world food production and a vision for the future of the CAP should, in our opinion, embrace:

climate change, deforestation, environmental degradation, scarce water resources, malnutrition, food security, self sufficiency, population growth, energy and localisation.

How disappointing therefore to find that the publication considered none of the above but concentrated largely on criticism of the existing CAP - "yawn". It is a measure of the deep poverty of this document that:

"global warming" is not mentioned,
"climate change" which appears just once, is brushed aside,
"local" is never mentioned in the context of local food production,
"water" is mentioned only in the context of EU water and pollution,
"energy" gets just one relevant mention as a footnote regarding set-aside,
"profitability" receives just two mentions, neither in a constructive way,
"deforestation", "biomass", "biofuels", "bioethanol", "CHP", "energy security",
"renewable", "new markets", "India", "China" and "population growth" are not mentioned at all.

Meanwhile the word "vision" is scattered a self-congratulatory 86 times while

"farmers" who are repeatedly criticised emerge 139 times. Where we ask, has it all gone wrong?

Desirable and innocuous as the vision goals appear, number 1 is largely incompatible with numbers 3, 4 and 5. It's simply a fact of life that in the global economy, somebody, somewhere will produce food cheaper than the EU if they don't have to observe the niceties of goals 3, 4 and 5.

Hereafter the analysis is selective, muddled, political and short sighted. Typical of the selective approach is:

Clause 2.38 draws its data from a 30 year period to conclude negatively rather than drawing data from the last 10 years, where an alternative conclusion would be drawn and later.....

Clause 2.38 then assumes that agri-environment schemes are responsible for the improvement shown by the alternative conclusion that was not drawn earlier in the paragraph!

Typical of muddled thinking is:

Clause 2.47 which seeks more control on set-aside even though the vision is one of free trade.

Clause 3.7 which seeks a free market for land but then seeks to regulate it.

Typical of the politically motivated is:

Clause 2.26 that states English farm incomes are 150% of average household income without quoting the year or source of the statistic or indeed its relevance.

Clause 2.29 which compares the net worth of UK farms with average mean net household wealth.

Clause 2.34 which states that agriculture has had a negative impact on the environment without recognising that so has every other aspect of modern society.

Typical of the short-sighted is:

Clause 3.44 which talks about agricultural trade liberalisation decreasing the self sufficiency of high income countries from 98% to 93% thereby deducing that trade liberalisation on food security may not be significant. The report fails to address:

the impact on the UK where self sufficiency is, even now, just 60%,
the impact on the poorest nations of the world where malnutrition is rife,
the environmental impact of reduced self sufficiency.

The Treasury, Defra vision advanced by this publication seems to have failed to understand that free trade will drive production to the parts of the world where the social, capital and environmental costs are lowest. Without a market mechanism that provides transparency on these costs, sustainable production will yield to systems of production that few consumers would willingly support.

For our part we offer the following vision:

A profitable agriculture supplying a mix of food, energy and conservation outputs that is socially and environmentally responsible.

An agricultural industry that is at the forefront of a new environmentalism, providing local solutions to global problems.

An industry that operates without trade distorting subsidies or tariffs.

An industry where the social, capital and environmental costs of production are transparent so that consumers can make informed choices about goods sourced from any part of the world.

A CAP that provides the infrastructure for a European marketplace that operates within a common, global, environmental framework.

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