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Collaborative learning for mutual benefit

The need to integrate political, social, economic, and ecological goals lies at the heart of sustainable agriculture and natural resource management. Environmental improvement can only be achieved by managing the implicit trade-offs between those areas. Lately the social component of sustainability has been more emphasised, why local knowledge, deliberative democracy, adaptive management, and rural development has become new catchwords on the political arena. But really, what this is all about is a notion that *in order to manage complex and controversial issues we have to develop collaborative learning and decision making processes*

in society. As a result we see such approaches emerge in both policy development and implementation strategies.

Realising that environmental problems are and have to be managed in a flexible and context-specific manner, as well as understanding that there always exist different perspectives on the same situation, are crucial insights in natural resource management. “The Baltic Farmers Forum on Environment” is a valuable venue where these issues can be elaborated further. But perhaps more important is that the member organisations have a crucial role when *initiating collaborative learning and decision making pro-*

cesses on local and international level. Processes which involves stakeholder from the whole agri-food system (from producer and retailer to end-consumer and policy-maker). I am convinced that such stakeholder collaboration will become one of the most important approaches on our way to a sustainable agriculture. It is also a process of mutual benefit.

Magnus Ljung
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NOTES OF THE EDITOR

This newsletter is published four times a year. You have received this copy since your e-mail address has been recommended by anyone of our member organisations. New subscribers are continuously added to the list. Please let the editorial office know of e-mail addresses to persons or organisations that you think should receive a copy. Send an e-mail to karin.persson@lrf.se to register.

The editorial office gladly accepts any comments on this newsletter.

Yours kindly
Markus Hoffman

Agriculture and environment in Norway

By Steinar Seljegaard, The Norwegian Farmers' Union

In Norway great emphasis is put on the multi-functional role of agriculture. This means that food production, environment and rural development are looked at in a context.

CONDITIONS ARE DIFFERENT

Agricultural conditions vary quite much in Norway, both as regards topographic and climatic conditions. The cultivated land is scattered all over the country – with concentrations in eastern parts around the Oslofjord and north of Oslo, in south-west around Stavanger and in Mid-Norway around the Trondheimfjord.

Norwegian agricultural policy has aimed at encouraging cereal production in the flat land of eastern Norway and to stimulate animal production, based on pasture and grass, in the valleys and in the western and northern parts of the country. The idea is to make use of all the arable land, and maintaining farms all over the country.

SEVERAL TASKS

Agriculture is a major contributor to maintaining employment and thereby a decentralised population structure. In one of four municipalities, agriculture and as-

sociated activities account for more than half of the jobs. A well-developed agricultural industry based on sound environmental production methods is a guarantee for future food security and safety. Agriculture also gives important social and environmental benefits, such as conservation of cultural landscapes and biodiversity.

SOME FACTS

There are 77,500 farms in Norwegian agriculture (1998). This number has decreased with some 2,500 farm holdings annually over the last decades. The total agricultural land has been fairly stable, and amounts to slightly above 1 mill hectares (1998). The average size of a holding is 13.5 hectares. An average dairy farm in Norway has 13 cows.

The total annual milk production amounts to 1,700 million litres. The total production of meat (cattle, lamb, pigs, poultry) was 250,000 tons in 1998. The total production of cereals this year was 1.4 million tons, with an average yield of wheat of 4,900 kilos per hectare. Approximately 70 per cent of total agricultural income in Norway relates to animal production, the rest is plant production (including vegetables, fruit and flowers).

Norway covers its own market with milk and meat products. The average self sufficiency degree (on a calorie basis), however, is only 52 per cent (1997).

The agricultural co-operatives, established and owned by the farmers, have a very strong position in Norway, as well as in the other Nordic countries.

THE NORWEGIAN FARMERS' UNION

Norges Bondelag – The Norwegian Farmers' Union – is the main farmers' union in Norway. The union works to secure Norwegian farmers satisfactory economic, social and cultural conditions.

Norges Bondelag was established in 1896. The union has 60,500 members (2000). Approximately 35,000 are producers/farm owners. The rest are family members and others who want to support the work of the union. The share of female members is 25 per cent.

PRIORITIES

Highest priority is given to improve the income level of farmers, to supply quality food, produced in environmental-friendly manners and to maintain viable rural areas all over the country.

It is important to improve the economic situation of

farmers. The average income per man-year in agriculture in Norway is well below 2/3 of an average industrial workers income. In this respect, the annual agricultural negotiations between the Government and the two farmers unions are most important. In these negotiations both target product prices and the amounts of governmental support measures, as well as social welfare and investments schemes, are agreed upon.

Of basic importance is the whole social and political "environment", all the framework conditions, laws and rules. Here is general political work directed to the Government and the Parliament the main thing. When it concerns the general agricultural policy as well as rural policy, the union try to influence also on regional parliamentarians though local and county farmers' representatives.

The objectives and priorities of the union has been formulated in an operative program which is a guideline for the organisation in the coming years.

MULTIFUNCTIONAL ROLE

Agriculture plays a multi-functional role. It provides food security, contributes to viable rural areas and presents a beautiful cultural

landscape. Norges Bondelag emphasises the management of natural resources. Farmers offer recreation possibilities to the general public including fishing and hunting, in summer as in winter. Norges Bondelag gives high priority to consumer preferences, environment, animal welfare and quality. The food produced by Norwegian farmers shall be safe, healthy and of high quality.

INTERNATIONAL CONDITIONS

International conditions, first and foremost the WTO-agreement (World Trade Organisation), represents important framework conditions for Norwegian agriculture. Therefore, Norges Bondelag takes active part in international co-operation between farmers' organisations. The union is a member of IFAP (International Federation of Agricultural Producers) and of CEA (The European Confederation of Agriculture).

CONSERVATION OF AGRICULTURAL LAND

Food production is dependant on access to cultivated land. Only 3 per cent of the total area in Norway is cultivated land. Every year a considerable amount of good agricultural land areas is built down. The pressure is great close to expanding cities. Therefore, Norwegian authorities have introduced a restrictive land conservation policy (The Act of Land

Conservation). It is important that the agricultural authorities participate in decision-making processes in other sectors, particularly in connection with planning processes in municipalities according to the Planning and Building Act. The agricultural authorities aim to help draw greater attention to the significance of agriculture in planning processes at local and regional level. The Norwegian Farmers' Union support the land conservation policy, and tries to influence on the authorities, not at least on local levels.

ENVIRONMENTALLY SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTION

Environmental considerations and measures are a fundamental premise for sustainable agriculture. Demands for profitability and efficiency have to be considered in relation to the environment and animal and plant health. Environmental measures and results also develop confidence in Norwegian agricultural products, and thereby enhancing competitiveness.

Norwegian agriculture has introduced environment- and resource plans. These plans includes a manure and fertiliser plan adapted to the individual farm. Further efforts will be made in order to reduce erosion and the leaking out from land areas of phosphor and nitrogen. Norway has to reach the claims for reductions which are stipulated in the North Sea De-

claration and the Nitrate Directive of the EU.

Norway is one of the countries in Europe that use least pesticides per area unit. Most farmers have participated in authorisation courses for use of plant protection means. Norway has a plan of action 1998–2002 aiming at reducing the risk for damage on health and environment from the use of plant protection means.

THE ENVIRONMENT BENEFITS OF AGRICULTURE

The Norwegian small scale agriculture has created a broad spectre of environmental benefits. It is a challenge to further develop and visualise these benefits for the society. The environmental benefits in agriculture are biologic, culture historical and aesthetic values created through active agricultural production. Examples are cultural landscape, biological manifold, cultural heritage, good plant and animal health and possibilities for walking and recreation.

Such environmental benefits are also important fundaments for new industries connected to agriculture, such as tourism.

ASSESSMENT OF THE AGRICULTURAL POLICY

The Government has presented a White Paper on Norwegian agriculture and food production. The White Paper will be discussed in the Storting (the parliament)

this spring, and decisions on guidelines will be made (due to recent change of Government in Norway, a change in this schedule may be made).

The (previous) Government has by the assessment of the Norwegian agricultural policy emphasised the benefits of agriculture to society on short and longer term. An aim is to increase the consumer direction in the food production. This implies the need for looking at the whole food chain in a context. In order to secure the consumers healthy and safe food the whole food chain from soil to table shall be covered by quality systems which will be looked after by rules and supervision.

It is taken into account that one will see a development where the consumers demands will be more and more directed against documented production, traceability, animal welfare and ethics. International circumstances will have increased importance for both price making and consumer patterns.



Latvian Agriculture and the Environment

By Alfons Speks, Agro-Environmental representative, Working Group leader, Latvian Farmers Federation

Latvian agriculture is increasingly becoming a difficult business in which to work. As a business agriculture has not only the duty of producing food products, but also two other very difficult functions to fulfil – protection of the environment and ensuring the survival of rural communities by the Latvian population.

All agricultural production is inextricably connected to the locality and the resultant environmental changes. This especially applies to traditional agricultural methods, which lead to environmental changes due to the use of the equipment, pesticides, mineral fertilisers etc. Previously these methods were mainly made available to us under the Soviet system, but sometimes they are still in use today. As a result the land may be improved or degraded as a result of soil erosion and plant physical – chemical parameter changes e.g. increased acidity, raising or lowering of the humus content).

LOW PRIORITY OF ECOLOGICAL AGRICULTURE

At present very few farmers in Latvia give priority to ecological agriculture or biological activities such as

organic fertilization, land erosion, grassland renewal, crop rotation, liming of acid soils, biological plant protection actions.

Ecological agriculture must comply with a complex package of general ecological requirements for product production. The products must be totally ecologically safe for the consumer, and production processes must maintain a clean air and water environment.

On this basis the Latvian Agricultural “Code of Good Practice” was developed last year.

The Code of Good Practice aims at ensuring the successful use of agricultural resources, which provide for changing human needs, as well as the protection or improvement of the environment and natural resources. Its main requirements are to lessen the dependence of agriculture on excessive fossil fuel usage, minimise soil and environment degradation and to ensure the continuation of the trend for increased per capita productivity.

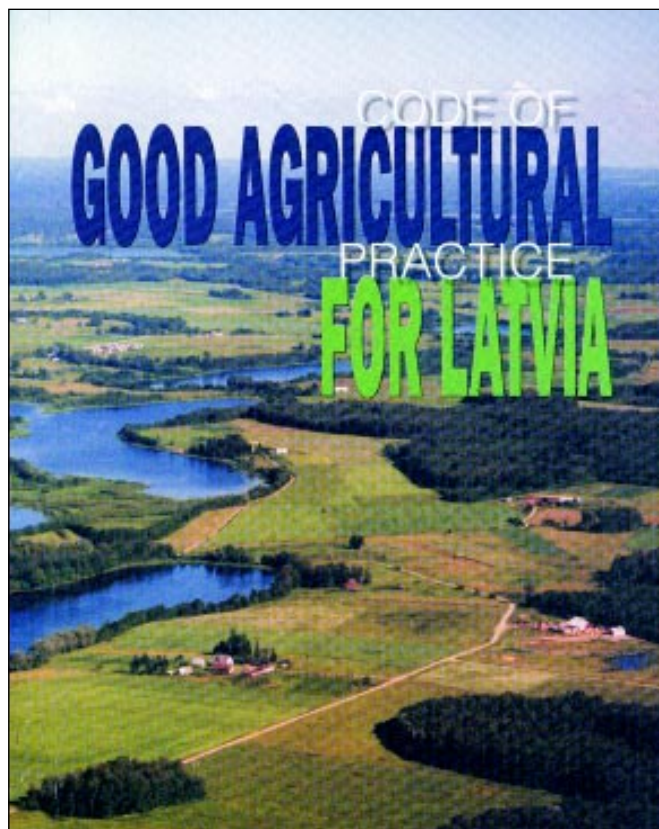
The Code of Good Practice encompasses three levels:

1. The Republic of Latvia’s legislative and regulatory requirements, which are obligatory and are already in operation.
2. The present recommendations for good practice, which could become obligatory and included in the legislature in the near future.
3. Future requirements, i.e. practices that could be applied today to provide visible rewards. Today has to be the first day of tomorrow.

CHANGE IN MANURE HANDLING DESIRED

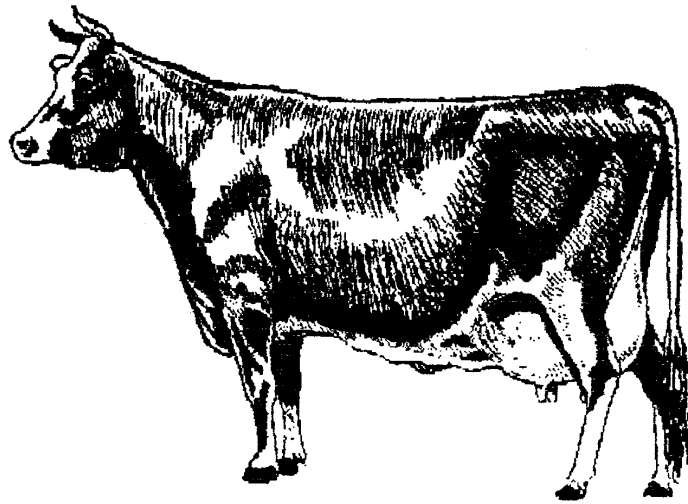
At present large quantities of manure are not used rationally. For every farm to meet requirements for crop and livestock development, it is vital that organic and livestock waste be collected and put to good use, i.e. land fertilization, feed etc. The waste must be collected and stored until properly used to ensure that water, both open and in particular groundwater, pollution cannot occur.

Generally, manure is collected and stored today in open and inadequate storage facilities until it is used as an ecological fertiliser, which may be supplemented with compost made from other waste products. In the near future livestock farmers will



be required to build manure storage facilities. A major problem is the lack of investment capital and loan facilities for such an undertaking, especially if pressure is put on the operations of existing farms that are not undergoing any reorganisation or renovation. Even for farms making major investments for improvements without state or SAPARD financial support this would be an insurmountable problem. It is a problem that requires a nation-wide solution.

In Latvia the use of mineral fertilisers reached a peak during the 1980's. Today the situation has dramatically changed; the use of mineral fertilisers has fallen to an extremely low level. Great care needs to be taken



concerning pesticide use; chemicals can remain in the soil for a long time, or get washed out of the soil into watercourses, or stored in vegetation. In Latvia only specially trained and qualified individuals are allowed

to work with or purchase poisonous chemicals.

NEW RURAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The Latvian Ministry of Agriculture, the Latvian Minis-

try of the Environment and Rural development, the Latvian Farmers Federation, the Latvian Agricultural University, as well as organisations from Sweden and Denmark were all involved in formulating the "Code of Good Practice".

At present the Latvian Ministry of Agriculture is participating in the preparation of the Latvian Rural Development Plan, which encompasses important measures to improve Latvia's rural and agricultural situation. These measures are closely connected with Latvia's desire to become a member of the EU. In addition, "environmental friendly agricultural methods" are to be included in
Please turn over



Latvia has at present a rich and unspoilt natural environment. For most visitors, the first single, very visible example of this is the large numbers of storks that visit each summer to raise their offspring.

Continued from page 5
the SAPARD funded program, which is one of the five SAPARD programs that will be financed from the European Union funds.

EU ENTRY CHANGES CONDITIONS

Agro-environmental programs have been developed for and operate in nearly all EU countries. Implementation of the program in Latvia will help to ensure a reduction of the negative impact of agriculture on the environment and preservation of a habitat for protected species, as well as ensuring that the country observes international conventions and complies with EU directives. It could in the future provide an opportunity for Latvian farmers to obtain financial support for environmental activities which otherwise would be uneconomical to the business of farming.

The average Latvian farmer is knowledgeable about the environmental situation in general and is willing and prepared to become involved in environmental protection projects. Some are already involved. An important factor for the future will be the decision as to who bears the cost for what.

Latvia has at present a rich and unspoilt natural environment. For most visitors, the first single, very visible example of this is the large numbers of storks that visit each summer to raise their offspring.

A question of whether the need/economic pressure for intensive industrial and agricultural production will prevent Latvia from being a place from which species and natural habitats can spread and thereby return to other countries, is of great importance today as "the first day of tomorrow".

