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REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL

on the implementation of Article 45 of Regulation (EU) N° 1306/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council on information measures relating to the common agriculture policy

{SWD(2021) 399 final}

I. INTRODUCTION

This report concerns the implementation of information measures relating to the common agricultural policy (CAP) for 2019 and 2020, under Article 45 of Regulation (EU) No 1306/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on the financing, management and monitoring of the common agricultural policy[1] (hereinafter 'the Regulation').

Article 45(1) first subparagraph of the Regulation states that information measures financed "shall aim, in particular, to help explain, implement and develop the CAP and to raise public awareness of its content and objectives to reinstate consumer confidence following crises through information campaigns, to inform farmers and other parties active in rural areas and to promote the European model of agriculture, as well as to help citizens understand it". Article 45(2) last subparagraph states that these measures "shall also contribute to the corporate communication of the Union's political priorities in so far as those priorities are related to the general objectives of this Regulation".

Information measures financed fall into two main categories:

- Those submitted by third party organisations for co-financing under the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund - EAGF (grants);
- Those at the initiative of the Commission and financed at a rate of 100% under the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund - EAGF (direct actions/public procurement).

According to Article 45(5) of the Regulation, a report on the implementation of the information measures under the Regulation shall be presented to the European Parliament and the Council every two years. This is the ninth such report[2].

In this period, the Directorate General for Agriculture and Rural Development (DG AGRI) continued to contribute to the ongoing development and implementation of the Commission's corporate communication actions. Resources were pooled from different spending programmes in order to fund communication priorities based on the general objectives of the European Union. In 2019, DG AGRI communication actions reflected how the Common Agricultural Policy contributed to the priorities of the Juncker Commission, especially on job creation, growth and investment, and delivering tangible benefits for citizens. At the same time, the Commission prepared to deliver on the headline ambitions of the Von der Leyen Commission, notably on the European Green Deal. In 2020, the new Commission was rapidly confronted with the coronavirus pandemic, and the need to organise a concerted and coordinated European response to the emergency. DG AGRI contributed to communicating at both the corporate and sectoral level on the measures taken to protect the health and safety of citizens, to assure the continued effective functioning of the food supply chain and food security, and on the future oriented recovery plan proposed by the Commission based on the Green Deal objectives.

In 2020, a Eurobarometer survey was carried out, as part of the regular tracking of EU citizens' perceptions on agriculture and the CAP. The three objectives of the CAP ranked highest by Europeans – providing safe, healthy food of high quality, ensuring a fair standard of living for farmers as well as protecting the environment and tackling climate change – have

[1] Official Journal of the European Union, OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 549.

[2] COM(2003) 235 final of 8.5.2003; COM(2007) 324 final of 13.6.2007; COM(2009) 237 final of 20.5.2009; COM(2011) 294 final of 25.5.2011; COM(2013) 645 final of 20.9.2013; COM(2016) 83 final of 23.2.2016; COM(2017) 777 final of 19.12.2017; COM(2019) 634 final of 17.12.2019.

remained overall stable since 2017. A growing majority of Europeans considers the CAP fulfils its objectives and that it benefits all citizens, not only farmers[3].

In addition, during 2020, an external evaluation support study[4] was carried out on the information policy on the Common Agricultural Policy. This found that the information measures undertaken were successful in improving understanding and perceptions with regard to the CAP. It also provided valuable guidance for the preparation of DG AGRI's external communication strategy for the period 2021–2025. The study also contributed to an overall evaluation of the information policy on the CAP, which was concluded with the publication of an evaluation report[5].

The annexes mentioned in the text are to be found in the Commission Staff Working document accompanying this report.

II. BUDGET

The budget made available for information measures under budget line 05 08 06, originally foreseen in the financing decision, was EUR 8 million in 2019; and EUR 8 million in 2020. In addition, in the framework of the Commission corporate communication actions during the period, EUR 5 655 000 were co-delegated from DG AGRI (from both EAGF and EAFRD) to DG Communication which is responsible for managing the Commission's corporate campaigns, in 2019, and EUR 7 545 000 in 2020.

The breakdown of the budget earmarked between public procurement (actions taken at the initiative of the Commission) and grants (co-financed actions) was as follows:

2019: public procurement (EUR 4 million) (50%) – Grants (EUR 4 million) (50%)
2020: public procurement (EUR 4 million) (50%) – Grants (EUR 4 million) (50%)

Execution of the 2019 measures reached 100% in terms of commitments, and 92.91% in terms of payments of committed amounts.

Execution of the 2020 measures reached 96.86% in terms of commitments; the figures for payments on 2020 measures were not yet finalised at the time of drafting this report as payments could still be made until 31 December 2021.

III. BREAKDOWN OF ACTIONS FINANCED

In 2019-2020, CAP information measures were strongly focussed on the future CAP and the Commission policy priorities. The reporting period coincided with the ongoing negotiations on the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) sectoral proposals on the reform of the CAP, presented by the Commission on 1 June 2018. In 2019, actions also included raising awareness on the European parliamentary elections, in the course of the ongoing outreach actions by DG AGRI to engage with citizens and stakeholders on the CAP reform proposals. There was a strong drive by the Commission on advancing the European Green Deal sustainability agenda, with the adoption of the Farm to Fork and Biodiversity strategies on 20 May 2020, and their ongoing discussion with the other EU institutions and stakeholders.

[3] https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2229.

[4] https://ec.europa.eu/info/food-farming-fisheries/key-policies/common-agricultural-policy/cmef/regulation-and-simplification/information-policy-common-agricultural-policy-1_en.

[5] Commission Staff Working Document, Evaluation on the information policy on the Common Agricultural Policy, SWD(2021)980.

Promoting awareness of the key role of the CAP in achieving the objectives of the European Green Deal was central to DG AGRI's communication efforts in this period; this included the importance of sustainability in all its dimensions, economic, social and environmental. As mentioned above, information on the Commission's urgent coordinated action at EU level in response to the outbreak of COVID-19 were of the highest priority in 2020. These included informing citizens and policymakers on the many measures adopted by the Commission with a view to simplifying the management of the CAP and providing financial support to farmers and rural communities. For citizens and stakeholders alike, the COVID-19 pandemic underlined the importance of a robust and resilient agro-food sector that functions in all circumstances. A further important priority in 2020 was communication around the preparation of a Long term Vision for EU Rural Areas.

Information actions were marked by reinforced cooperation with other Commission departments, including DG Communication (COMM), DG Health and Food Safety (SANTE), DG Research and Innovation (RTD), the Joint Research Centre and DG Environment (ENV). This reflected the cross cutting nature of the Green Deal agenda. To ensure that key CAP messages were conveyed as part of the overall Green Deal narrative, DG AGRI developed specific communication material, for example, on organic, quality and innovation policy; in addition, use of digital tools and social media was intensified so as to improve the effectiveness of communication towards stakeholders and citizens.

1. Grants (co-financed information measures taken at the initiative of third party organisations)

Article 45 (information measures) of the Regulation envisages two types of measures to be funded through grants, annual work programmes or other specific measures presented by third parties. Specific information measures refer to information events limited in time and space and implemented on the basis of a single budget. The activities included can range from conferences to a comprehensive information campaign covering several types of information activities (such as audiovisual productions, press articles, digital media communication, organising seminars and conferences or attending agro-food fairs) carried out in various regions and/or Member States. An annual work programme is a set of two to five specific information measures. For 2019 and 2020, it was decided (as in previous years) to retain only specific information measures for co-financing, with the aim of simplifying the grants scheme and ensuring coherence between the different communication actions.

The calls for proposals[6] [7] encouraged information actions focussing specifically on the economic, environmental and social dimensions of a sustainable Common Agricultural Policy. As regards the stakeholder target group, the aim was to ensure greater awareness of the CAP's contribution to supporting sustainability. In relation to the general public (and in particular young people in urban areas), the calls encouraged *inter alia* novel approaches to engage with young people; these were targeted at school children, teachers and university students and focussed, for example, on raising awareness of the role of the CAP in meeting the climate change challenge as well as encouraging healthy eating habits. Overall, the aim

[6] Call for proposals for grants 2019, Official Journal of the European Union 2018/C 395/03 of 31.10.2018.

[7] Call for proposals for grants 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/other_eu_prog/imcap/wp-call/infome-01-2020_en.pdf.

was to raise public awareness on the relevance for citizens of EU support to agriculture and rural development, and its contribution to meeting the Green Deal objectives.

In 2019, eighteen measures were co-financed, and in 2020 twenty two measures. This makes a total of 40 co-financed actions for the period 2019-2020, all at a rate of 60% of the eligible costs actually incurred, plus a flat-rate contribution of 7% of the eligible costs. In the 2019-2020 period, twenty five grants were awarded to media and communications agencies for measures promoting awareness of the importance of agriculture and the rural areas for society as a whole; these included actions with a significant trans-national element carried out by media companies active in different Member States. The projects illustrated how the CAP contributes towards the delivery of the Union's political priorities, and addresses the sustainability of agriculture, in all its dimensions. Often, these actions included pedagogical elements and awareness raising events on food and farming, emphasising the role of EU support and the importance of generational renewal for the sector.

Support was also given to eight actions at national level led by producers' associations or entities with strong links to the agricultural sector; these projects focussed on the current and future challenges facing EU agriculture and rural areas and the promotion of sustainability. Also at national level *inter alia* an academic institution focussed on the future opportunities for young farmers. In addition, an EU level rural development association organised a cross-border project focussed on supporting students in agricultural training. Furthermore, two organisations active in the environmental domain at national level, and also one at EU level, received support for measures to raise awareness of issues related to protecting the environment and safeguarding biodiversity in the context of the Farm to Fork strategy and European Green Deal priorities.

Frequently, grant awarded projects included an educational component targeting school children, teachers and university students. These actions were designed to engage with young people, raise their awareness of the CAP and its contribution in many areas such as climate change, food security, and the promotion of healthy diets as a lifestyle choice.

Due to the restrictions enacted by national authorities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, some grant awarded projects were confronted with major difficulties in the implementation of their actions. These had an impact in particular on the activities related to the organisation of seminars in schools, of conferences and participation in agro-food fairs. In line with the global approach agreed across the European Commission, DG AGRI continued to adopt a high level of flexibility in seeking solutions to ensure the execution of these projects.

The Commission Staff Working Document accompanying this report gives detailed information on the grants awarded during the reporting period, including the number of successful applications per Member State.

In the 2019-2020 period, it is important to emphasise that a considerable number of co-financed actions reached a wider audience beyond the immediate participants, due to the multiplier effect of the specialised press and media, as well as increased use of digital and social media as dissemination tools.

Applications were assessed in the light of rigorous eligibility, exclusion, selection and award criteria as laid down in the calls for proposals. This was in line with the Financial Regulation

and reflected the Commission's aim to achieve equal treatment and fair competition between applicants[8].

2. Direct actions/public procurement (information measures taken at the initiative of the Commission)

In 2019-2020, as in the past, an important number of information measures were carried out at the initiative of the Commission. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic led to the cancellation of most face to face events in 2020 (as of 1 March), the adjustment of others and notably to a general move to the use of on-line organisational modes throughout the year.

a) Media and on-line communication

Supporting the media with timely relevant information on the current and future CAP and rural development policy continued to feature strongly in this period. The platform aimed at journalists interested in food and farming issues, www.Ag-Press.eu, was further enhanced. The organisation of study visits, seminars and (in 2020) on-line webinars helped foster the exchange of knowledge and experience between Ag-Press members, and deepened their understanding of EU actions in agriculture and rural areas.

Networking activities included the organisation of two study trips to Romania, and Finland during their Presidencies of the EU in 2019. The study trip to the Cluj region of Romania included expert briefings, and visits to arable and wine enterprises, which demonstrated the role of modern technology in their achievements. The rich traditional cheese making heritage of the region and its success on the EU market, supported by use of modern marketing techniques, was also showcased. Another highlight was a commercially successful organic project based on the Transylvanian tradition of cold pressing raw seeds. The exchanges with producers and rural entrepreneurs on the ground in both Finland and Romania provided insights into the diversity of farming conditions in different Member States and the challenges they face.

In addition, in the first half of 2019, a seminar was organised for the Ag Press network as part of a sustained focus on communicating on the further progress made in the Africa-EU partnership in agriculture. This followed the milestone third African Union – European Union agricultural ministerial conference in June 2019 which, for the first time, endorsed a Political Declaration, accompanied by an action agenda, with the overall aim of further strengthening cooperation in food and farming at all levels. This communication effort involved mobilising different tools (press conference with participation of the EU Commissioner for Agriculture and his African Union counterpart, press releases, fact sheets, extensive digital and social media activity).

In 2020, due to the pandemic restrictions, no press trips took place. However, three Ag-Press webinars were organised to highlight key EU policy priorities. The extensive Covid-related EU support measures were the subject of the first webinar (20 May); this focussed, in particular, on the diverse measures adopted to ensure that EU wide supply chains continued to operate, and EU support to SMEs, farmers and rural areas to help mitigate the effects of the crisis. The second webinar marked the adoption of the Farm to Fork strategy (20 May), with the participation of Mr Janusz Wojciechowski, Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural

[8] More detailed information on grants are also to be found on the Europa website: http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/grants-for-information-measures_en.

Development and Ms Stella Kyriakides, Commissioner for Health and Food Safety. This event addressed sustainability and the role of the future CAP in achieving sustainable food systems. The issues of innovation and generational renewal in farming were the subject of a third webinar (15 December). These in-depth exchanges with senior Commission officials from DG AGRI and JRC helped deepen the understanding of media representatives on these crucial policy issues, and allowed sharing of embargoed information on the Agricultural Outlook 2020-2030 report and the Farmers of the Future study.

In the reporting period, DG AGRI continued to develop its social media capacity and web based communication. Expanded social media activity helped substantially to raise awareness of the CAP and resulted in increased engagement rates with key target audiences. It led to more efficient and effective dissemination of messages across all platforms, ensuring regular coverage of a wide variety of topics. In parallel, improved tracking and monitoring of online content performance facilitated making the necessary adjustments to ensure timely appropriate messaging for audiences; it also generated faster and more effective responses to followers. Extensive user-friendly communication material developed for web and social media helped raise awareness of the role of the CAP in meeting the Green Deal priorities, and the measures adopted to address the COVID 19 crisis in the agro-food sector. More use of audio-visual and graphic tools increased significantly the range and appeal of DG AGRI's social media communication. A particularly noteworthy example was the attractive communication campaign developed to illustrate geographical indications, the EU's culinary heritage, and quality policy. Another was the production of vivid audio-visual content to highlight the "farmers of the future" project, the joint DG AGRI-JRC initiative on innovative solutions to address future challenges in the agricultural sector. DG AGRI continued to work with DG COMM and other DGs to ensure a coordinated dissemination of content at the corporate level, thus improving the efficiency of its output**.**

b) Conferences, fairs and events

In this period, engaging with stakeholders and reaching out to the general public continued to be a priority for DG AGRI's communication actions.

Conferences were an important means for consultation and the exchange of information and ideas on vital policy issues between the Commission and a wide variety of stakeholders, at regional, national and international level. For example, the results of the review of the EU Forest Strategy were presented at the Conference "Our Forests, Our Future" organised by the Commission in Brussels on 25-26 April 2019. The conference confirmed the vital importance of forests and forestry in the context of the Paris Agreement and the 2030 UN Sustainable Development Goals. Keynote addresses by the Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development, the Romanian Secretary of State for Forests representing the Presidency of the Council of the EU, and the Commissioner for Climate Action and Energy set the scene for a comprehensive debate on the potential of the forestry sector to further contribute to advancing EU economic, social, environmental and climate goals. Overall, communicating on this theme continued to be a key objective over the period.

In addition, the work on the Farm to Fork strategy, a key component of the Green Deal, started in December 2019. The 2019 EU Agricultural Outlook Conference was focused on sustainability from farm to fork. More specifically, the interventions covered a number of initiatives undertaken by actors in the food chain to improve the sustainability of production, consumption and trade. Besides climate change, further sustainability aspects were explored, such as preserving the economic viability of farms, the vitality of rural communities,

biodiversity and natural resources. Evolving societal demands and consumer expectations, in particular for sustainable food, were also addressed while examining the outlook for EU markets by 2030. The Conference gathered over 600 stakeholders, representing EU institutions, governments and international organisations, those involved in the food chain, the socio-professional sector, market experts, academics and think tanks, and the broader civil society. Widespread dissemination of proceedings was ensured using webstreaming, digital and social media tools.

In 2020, communication around sustainability and especially on achieving the European Green Deal objectives was further enhanced. DG AGRI and DG SANTE jointly organised the first "Farm to Fork" conference in an on-line format on 15-16 October 2020. The Commissioners for Agriculture and Rural Development, and Health and Food Safety, participated in the opening and closing ceremonies and emphasised the Commission's wish to engage with stakeholders and civil society so as to advance together in achieving progress towards sustainable food systems. The advantages of the on-line format were reflected in the high level of participation; this was also evident in the "Strengthening geographical indications" event organised in November which explored ways and means to strengthen EU quality policy, and the December 2020 Outlook conference. However, the less positive aspects of the online format, in relation to the lack of human interaction, and its impact on the exchange of good practice and networking were also highlighted by participants.

Face to face interaction with the general public and stakeholders at farm fairs remained an important activity. DG AGRI was present at eight agricultural fairs and events in 2019, often in cooperation with other Commission departments. Attractive dynamic communication material including publications were made available; events were organised, in particular for families and schoolchildren. The objective was to listen and engage and increase the visibility and accessibility of the EU institutions at local level.

In early 2020 (as in 2019), DG AGRI, in cooperation with DG SANTE, participated with a stand on the sustainability theme, in two major agricultural fairs: the Internationale Grüne Woche in Berlin, and the Paris Salon International de l'Agriculture. All other fairs planned for 2020 were cancelled due to the pandemic restrictions.

DG AGRI continues to explore possibilities to leverage its different events to maximise outreach to citizens, as for example, at the agricultural fair in Okra (FI) at the start of the Finnish presidency of the EU in July 2019. On that occasion, in cooperation with stakeholders and the national authorities, a Citizens' Dialogue on the future CAP took place, with the participation of the Minister for Agriculture, the President of MTK, the producers and cooperatives association, and AGRI officials. In addition, frequently, the participation at major fairs of the Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development, together with senior Member State representatives, generated widespread interest and extensive coverage in the national and regional media.

IV. THE PROPORTION OF SPENDING (COMMITTTMENTS AND PAYMENTS) BETWEEN CO-FINANCED ACTIONS AT THE INITIATIVE OF THIRD PARTIES (GRANTS) AND INFORMATION ACTIONS AT THE INITIATIVE OF THE COMMISSION (PUBLIC PROCUREMENT)[9]

	2019			2020		
All figures in EUR	Grants	Public procurement	Total	Grants	Public procurement	Total
Actual budget	4.000.000	4.000.000	8.000.000	3.935.189	3.064.812	7.000.001
Commitments + Co-Delegation (*)	4.025.093	3.974.786	7.999.879	3.935.189	2.844.906 (**)	6.780.095 (**)
% of consumption	100,63%	99,37%	100,00%	100,00%	92,82%	96.86%
Payments	3.674.830	3.757.698	7.432.528	N/A (***)	N/A (***)	N/A (***)
% of payment vs. Commitment/Co-Delegation (*)	91,30%	94,54%	92,91%	N/A (***)	N/A (***)	N/A (***)

(*) Figures including commitments level 1 or 2 as well as budget spent by co-delegated entities.
(**) Based on DG AGRI's external communication action plan amendment.
(***) Payments of these actions are ongoing and not yet finalised.

Payments are generally lower than the amounts originally committed. In the case of grants, this can be explained by the fact that final costs of the actions are lower than initially foreseen by the beneficiary, and secondly, because not all expenses declared by the beneficiaries can be considered as eligible. In the case of actions taken at the initiative of the Commission, the difference between payments and commitments arises from the fact that, while commitments are fixed, actual expenditure is less than that foreseen due to savings and the use of more cost-effective measures during implementation.

V. CONCLUSION

Promoting the EU's sustainability objective, its aim to transform the EU into a fair and prosperous society, with a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy, was central to the Commission's communication actions in 2019-2020. In this period, the CAP information measures, reflecting this objective, highlighted the simplification and modernisation of the future CAP, its capacity to better respond to the emerging economic, environmental and social challenges, its focus on supporting viable farm income, bolstering environmental and climate action, strengthening the socio-economic fabric of rural areas and addressing societal concerns.

9 EUR 13.200.000 – codelegated to DG Communication in 2019 and 2020 for corporate communication activities is not included in this table.