

AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT IN GREECE

By L. Louloudis¹ and D. Dimopoulos²

As it is widely recognized, European Union's environmental policy in conjunction with CAP's agro-environmental measures will have important repercussions in the way agriculture is practiced and more generally on the spatial re-ordering of socioeconomic activities in the rural sector over the medium and long term.

Generally speaking, Greece belongs among the "lagging" states with the regard to the application of environmental policy. Public opinion and the political order hesitate to dedicate public resources in the protection and conservation of nature. There is no tradition of environmental policy. Implementation of EU Reg. 2078/92 and of certain critical Directives of the EU environmental policy in Greece has been inscribed in this political framework

Reg. 2078/92: The initial plan for Reg. 2078/92 addressed to a large extent the greater environmental problems of the agricultural sector. However, in the process of its implementation, the priorities set by this initial plan were reversed, e.g. the budget for the anti-erosion protection program which constituted 64% of the total budget was never applied. Also, not a single initiative was taken for to take on board education and information programs.

With considerable delay, between December 1994 and June 1995, Greece submitted the following programs for approval:

- a. "Biological agriculture"
- b. "Reduction of nitrogen-pollution from agriculture sources in the Thessaly plain"
- c. "Protection and conservation of biodiversity and genetic diversity". Sub programs:
"Conservation of endangered species of farm animals" and "Conservation of local varieties of cultivated plants"
- d. "Long term set-aside of farmlands"
- e. "Protection of habitats of specific importance"

The first programs were approved three years after the date of enactment of the Regulation that is in July 1995.

The overall progress of these programs up to 1999, based on the latest data supplied by the MoA is shown in the TABLE.

In Greece land covered by these programs is 1% of the total AUA, corresponding figure for EU 15 is 19,5%. The FEOGA expenses for Greece up to 1998 were 16,9 mil. ECU and these expenses corresponded to 0,3% of total EU 15 expenditure.

¹ Assistant Professor at Agricultural University of Athens, Department of Agricultural Economics and Development

² Researcher at Agricultural University of Athens, Department of Agricultural Economics and Development

1. Program for the reduction of nitrogen-pollution from agricultural sources in the Thessaly plain

Agriculture in Thessaly plain consists chiefly in the intensive irrigated monoculture of cotton. Farmers are obligated to execute a crop rotation program with durum wheat and to work towards a reduction in quantity of nitrogenous fertilizers. Furthermore they are obligated to use drip irrigation systems which reduce washing out of nitrogen and soil erosion. An approved amendment of the above scheme in April 1999 has mainly to do with extending the program to include in the rotation plan other intensive cultivation as corn, industrial tomato, sugarbeet, watermelon, honeydew, dry onions, dry garlic, dry beans and fresh green beans. It is a zonal program of a pilot kind. Until now 29,516 Ha have been included in the program. The program has essentially been completed, as the plain of Thessaly has been included among the target areas for the nitrogen Directive EU 91/676 and the necessary measures arising from this Directive make it ineligible for payments under the agro-environmental Regulation. The scheme has been applied to dispersed areas in only 5% of the plain, and since there was no selection criterion for which lands would be included in the program, neither in terms of sensitivity to any ecological factor in the environment, nor based on contribution of lands to pollution, the program is not expected to have beneficial impacts on water quality

2. Biological agriculture program

The areas which received priority were areas in the NATURA 2000 network and second priority was received by island, mountainous and semi-mountainous regions. An amendment was approved in January of 1999, after three years of implementation. Only 3 out of the 52 prefectures of the country participated in the scheme so effected 60% of olive orchards and the objective of its implementation in ecologically vulnerable areas was only partially realized. Through the amendment a more balanced and planned development was reached. In any case it is considered that this scheme encouraged farmers to turn to biological agriculture. The number of biological farm holdings included in the scheme amounted to 1,165. Recently the Union of Professional Bio-cultivators of Greece vehemently protested against the decision of the MiO to cut the support of their production with the completion of five years under this particular scheme.

3. Long term set-aside of farm lands

The program includes two discreet measures: measure A aims to create biotopes and ecoparks on areas of ecological importance, measure B regards the protection of water systems from agricultural pollution. Priority has been given to the implementation of measure A. The projected area of implementation is 25,000 Ha. Until now 20,000 ha have been included in the program, 80% of which land is in areas belonging to the NATURA 2000 network and the remaining 20% in areas bordering on the network lands, in riverside and other areas of ecological importance. The 20-year of the program is too long for us to appraise the impacts in certain zones at this time.

4. Program for the conservation of rare races of farm animals.

This is a program of five-year duration and has been applied since 1998. The objective of the program is the maintenance and increase of animals belonging to races that are under threat of extinction.

Implementation of environmental Directives

Directives 91/676 on the control of nitrogen pollution and 92/43 on the conservation of habitats are still in the preliminary stages of implementation leaving farmers, up to know, totally “out of the game”.

1. Nitrogen Directive

Greece eight years after the adoption of nitrates directive has not enacted the measures demanded by the directive’s implementation timeframe. Recent acceleration of the necessary steps to be taken apparently relates to the Commission threats to take the country to the European Court. Already 4 vulnerable zones have been designated, although the scientific criteria for this designation provoke some discussion. The proposed zones are large in area and they are among the most agriculturally productive. The rules of appropriate agricultural practices set by the MoA in 1994 are under a process of review. Paradoxically initiatives have not been taken to inform and sensitize farmers about the forthcoming changes of their farming practices.

2. NATURA 2000 Network

Under the 92/43 directive, known as the “habitats” directive, 264 sites with a total area of 2,635,613 Ha will be included in the NATURA 2000 network. This area corresponds to 20% of the country, while on the level of EU, in the early 1999, the proposed area corresponds to 9% of landed territory. In these areas are included agricultural zones which are currently of unknown size but clearly not negligible. Successful implementation of this directive is dependent on the degree of acceptance and compromise among opposing interests in various social groups and strata (farmers, environmentalists, state officials, local authorities e.t.c.) which are inevitably involved. It does seem that the creation of this network provoked a reaction of widespread worry among farmers. Unfortunately, despite the self-evident significance of the directive, farmers lack any information about it, and the communication between them and the authorities either central/regional or local is more than obvious.

CONCLUSIONS

- In the case of agro-environmental policy the delays in submission and approval of schemes led to their limited implementation and by extension to limited absorption of the allocated resources. The objectives regarding cultivated areas have remained very limited. Numbers of farm holdings and their land that has been included in the schemes is, compared with that of the other member-states, exceptionally small. So, it is very difficult to accept that so far the Greek agricultural sector would be influenced by agro-environmental policy.
- Greece despite the fact that initial designs had corresponded to agricultural and environmental reality, could not in the end enact programs that would incorporate the specificities of Mediterranean ecosystems, such as water shortage, forest fires or above soil erosion.
- The MoA began to enact AEP more because they were considered as supplementary source of income for farmers than because the Ministry was convinced of the necessity of such programs. Farmers considered AEP as a solution to the difficulties they were encountered with the cut of subsidies for certain products (i.e. cotton).
- Regarding efficiency of implementation lack of previous administrative experience and the well known weaknesses of Greek public sector was combined with the underestimation of the

need for a policy of farmers training and sensitization, all of which are basic prerequisites for the success of AEP.

- Monitoring the implementation process was not without problems but the elementary mechanisms of public administration did function. However, such mechanisms were absent from the institutionally demanded process of policy evaluation.
- Despite all weaknesses and failures, AEP have become a constituent element of policy deemed reliable by the new orientations of CAP and the various measures which aim to encourage environmental initiatives in rural sector and increased sensitivity toward the environment in society as a whole.
- Implementation of environmental directives 92/43 and 91/676 has suffered at the hands of a bureaucratic worldview. The success of these highly important directives for a reconceptualisation of rural space and the role of farmers in it is dependent mainly on the reception of such objectives by the greater social body and more specifically by the agricultural policy network (policy makers, politicians, organized professional interests, cooperatives, individual framers). The political process for such a reception/negotiation is still lagging behind.

Table 1. Status of Agri-environmental Programmes from Regulation EU No. 2078/92 (1992-1999)

Programme	No. of Producers	Extent of Programme (in ha)	Expenditure (ECU)	Share of total budget programme (%)
Reduction of Nitrogen-pollution from agricultural sources in Thessaly plain	3,444	29,516.0	14,326,322	42.7
Long term set-aside in exploitation of agricultural land	125	21,579.4	11,628,661	34.6
Conservation of endangered breeds of animals	not available		733,224	2.1
Organic farming	1,305	6,501.6	6,855,994	20.4
Total	4,874	57,597.0	33,544,196	100

Source: Ministry of Agriculture, Department of Protection of the Environment and Natural Resources, data elaborated by the authors, 1999.

