



European Federation of Food,
Agriculture and Tourism Trade Unions

Autumn 2017

Towards a social agricultural policy

**The positions of agricultural
unions on social issues involving
the EU Common Agriculture
Policy (CAP)**



IMPRESSUM

European Federation of Food, Agriculture and Tourism Trade Unions (EFFAT)

Lead author: Harald Wiedenhofer

Editor: Arnd Spahn

CONTACT

European Federation of Food, Agriculture and Tourism Trade Unions (EFFAT)

Rue Fossé-aux-Loups 38

BE – 1000 Brussels

Tel.: +32.22.18.77.30

E-Mail: effat@effat.org

www.effat.org



Foreword

The creation of social instruments within or linked to the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is the main focus of agricultural unions in Europe.

For the 10 million agricultural workers and their unions, the CAP is of crucial importance, as without it many farms in Europe would be unable to survive.

Nevertheless, agricultural workers are well aware that the CAP is unsocial. It is not sufficiently linked to European Union priorities and makes no use of its possibilities to promote social cohesion and put an end to inhuman working conditions.

They are calling for an end to subsidies for employers who exploit workers and do not provide proper conditions of employment. They are calling for written information on their employment relationships from the first day of employment. And they are calling for the application of the EU framework directive on health and safety at work for assessing good working practices as the basis for the distribution of CAP direct payments.

Employees need to be trained. This is the only way to improve their qualifications and employability. For this reason, CAP-financed training programmes in EU Member States should also be open to employees.

These demands come from the 10-million-strong European agricultural workforce. Together with their families, they constitute a population of 25 million, i.e. a major slice of the total EU population. They have called on their unions to fight on their behalf to make Europe more social.

This brochure shows how easily this can be.

We look forward to your comments and critical remarks.

The EFFAT agricultural secretariat

THE IMPORTANCE OF AGRICULTURAL WORKERS IN EUROPE

While there is an ongoing heated debate on the future of the CAP, it is often forgotten that a large group of people in the agricultural sector are dependent on this policy. Through their labour, agricultural workers throughout Europe produce food and raw materials, maintain the environment and contribute to social cohesion in rural areas. Some 10 million employees work on farms, planting, tending and harvesting fruit and vegetables, wine and cereals. They work with livestock, breeding and feeding cattle, pigs, sheep, goats and poultry, watching over their health and producing milk and other meat and dairy products.

They are to be found working in the forests of Europe, as well as in lakes, rivers and coastal regions where they produce fish, seafood and crustaceans.

Renewable raw materials and the production of renewable energy are inconceivable without them. In many countries they help maintain biodiversity in nature protection zones, inform the population and protect natural habitats.

Constituting an important slice of Europe's rural population, these 25 million agricultural workers and their families help ensure long-term social cohesion.

THE SOCIAL SITUATION OF AGRICULTURAL WORKERS

While in Northern and Central European countries it is normal for skilled workers – the core workforce – to be employed the whole year round, with additional support from seasonal workers at peak times (above all, harvest-time), the situation is very different in Mediterranean countries where a large part of the core workforce is made up of workers with fixed-term, seasonal contracts. Due to the high numbers of refugees, illegal and informal employment relationships are commonplace. Refugees, women and young workers are often exploited.

Day labourers very often suffer from inhuman working conditions. They have hardly any chance to enforce their rights, as they have no ways of even proving their employment relationships.

Seasonal workers, working for months on end abroad and far away from their families, sometimes do not even get paid. They as well need clear documentation of their work.

THE EU DIRECTIVE ON AN EMPLOYER'S OBLIGATION TO INFORM EMPLOYEES OF THE CONDITIONS APPLICABLE TO THE CONTRACT OR EMPLOYMENT RELATIONSHIP

Directive 91/533/EEC obliges employers to provide each employee with written information on the conditions applicable to his/her contract/employment relationship within 2 months of starting work.

This directive is of great importance for agricultural workers, as it ensures that they are informed about the most important conditions of their employment relationship. Yet in many cases the directive does not apply. Day labourers and seasonal workers would only be able to benefit from the directive when the obligation to provide information applies from the first day of work.

This why agricultural unions in Europe have compiled a draft information sheet available in all employer and employee languages and for use in all employment relationships with a minimum of red tape.

Application of Directive 91/533/EEC from the first day of employment has the potential to be a decisive instrument for effectively protecting workers against exploitation.



THE LINK BETWEEN DIRECTIVE 91/533/EEC AND THE CAP

Agricultural unions in Europe are calling for the provision of such written information to be taken into account when distributing CAP direct payments to establishments. Just as the well-being of livestock and the environment are already taken into account in this respect, the well-being of workers should also be taken into account. Any employer not employing his workers properly and/or not having given them an information sheet on their employment relationship should receive lower CAP direct payments (or in the case of severe breaches, none at all).

THE EUROPEAN FRAMEWORK DIRECTIVE ON HEALTH AND SAFETY AT WORK

Directive 89/391/EEC establishes minimum standards for health and safety at work. Applicable in all Member States, its constituent directives form a strong basis for ensuring the safety of employees. One important instrument is risk assessment, an element which constitutes the concrete implementation of the EU health and safety legislation in establishments.

THE LINK BETWEEN DIRECTIVE 89/391/EEC AND THE CAP

Compared with other sectors, agricultural work is very dangerous. Fatal work-related accidents, injuries and occupational diseases occur more frequently than in other sectors. For this reason, compliance with EU health and safety standards should also be a criterion for the distribution of CAP direct payments. This can be enforced by CAP inspectors from the competent authorities in the Member States checking whether risk assessments have been made in the respective establishments.

TRAINING FOR AGRICULTURAL WORKERS AS WELL

The second pillar of the CAP enables Member States to finance training programmes for people working in the agricultural sector. In a number of countries, this funding is being used to train agricultural workers, enabling them to work better, to improve the quality of their work and to protect the environment. Employability is similarly improved, with workers given the skills to better cope with upcoming changes in their work. This also gives workers the chance to develop their skills and move up the career ladder.

We are calling for an obligation allowing agricultural workers to take part in CAP-financed training programmes.

SUMMARY

Written information can be compiled in less than a minute per employee in large establishments and in less than three minutes in small ones, and handed out to workers on the first day of employment.

Risk assessments can be easily controlled by CAP inspectors on the ground – just as easily as livestock protection rules are controlled.

Employees in all Member States should be able to take part in CAP-financed training programmes.