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TWENTY-FIFTH FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR EUROPE

Riga, Latvia, 8-9 June 2006

Main conclusions and list of recommendations stemming from the debate in the 34th session of the ECA on item: Development in the European Agrifood markets: impact on producers and consumers and perspectives

I. Extract from the document ECA 34/06/REP/1

22. The Commission welcomed the document as it provided a useful contribution on a number of important elements concerning agricultural and food supply chains, especially in Central and Eastern Europe and the CIS countries.
23. Special reference was made by the Commission regarding the importance of traceability as a very important concept in EU policy and a fundamental part of its integrated “from farm to fork” approach.
24. The Commission took note of the efforts of the paper to explore the impact of changes in contractual arrangements on agricultural productivity, quality, and opportunities for small farmers.
25. The Commission highlighted that marginalization of small farms would be an important point to be examined.
26. The Commission also took note of the references made to the different approaches in measuring competitiveness, particularly the ability by retailers or producers to meet standards and recalled that other factors such as infrastructure, storage, transport costs and integration of markets can also strongly influence competitiveness.
27. The Commission underlined that assuring food quality and safety standards continue to be challenges in parts of the region and further efforts should be devoted to this important aspect.
28. The Commission noted that improving production, marketing and adopting food quality and safety standards in the processing industry were considered crucial for increasing trade opportunities of new EU member states to the Western European market.

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29. The Commission suggested to support enhancing access to information, resources and equipment allowing gradual quality improvement also for small and medium-sized agrifood businesses.
30. The Commission highlighted that vocational training, strengthening agriculture extension services and stimulating farmer groups and marketing cooperatives were important measures to improve access of small farmers to the market.
31. The Commission endorsed the recommendations outlined in the document and requested forwarding them to the 25th Regional Conference for Europe.

II. List of Recommendations

The Commission endorsed the following recommendations from document ECA/34/06/3 (page 13):

- a) Ministries of Agriculture are invited to take due note of the difficulties of meeting private food safety and production standards and changing consumer preferences for small farmers in CEE and CIS countries. It is important that farmers in these countries are not excluded from restructured food supply chains.
- b) Governments of the region should consider assisting farmers through a sustainable extension system that includes training in marketing and on how agricultural producers can meet private food safety standards and better meet other customer and consumer preferences. This will involve improving the ability of extension agencies to provide technical expertise to farmers to fulfil international certification schemes such as EUREPGAP.
- c) Strengthening the agricultural sector will require the upgrading of national food control infrastructures (management, inspection and laboratory capacities) to provide a sound basis for farmers, and agro-processors to gradually improve levels of quality and safety.
- d) Improving access to restructured supply chains for small farms typically requires stimulating intermediary organizations and marketing cooperatives, to coordinate the activities of farmers and provide a link between them and processors and retailers. Support to establish sustainable intermediary organizations with the requisite competencies and infrastructure will be of greater benefit than investments in new wholesale market infrastructure.
- e) Agricultural education and training in the region should be restructured so that it better prepares farmers for the new realities of supply chains (including contract farming, quality control and management) and incorporates training in marketing and agribusiness management.
- f) FAO is ready to provide support to member governments, upon request, in the above-mentioned fields.