

# AUSTRIA'S WAY TO SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURAL POLICY

Franz GREIF

## Résumé

*Quatre considérations résument la politique autrichienne de soutien à l'agriculture, tout en étant caractéristiques de son niveau socio-économique et de sa position de pointe en matière d'écologie :*

- 1. Les éléments socio-économiques et écologiques dans la politique agricole autrichienne ont une tradition vieille de plusieurs décennies.*
- 2. L'agriculture « éco-sociale » - la voie autrichienne dans le contextes des relations internationales de politique agricole - est en passe de consolidation.*
- 3. La préservation des zones rurales - l'objectif de la politique régionale en Autriche - présente de bonnes perspectives, mais nécessite encore d'importants efforts politiques.*
- 4. Le contenu du concept autrichien « d' éco-territoire » aura des suites sur l'agriculture et l'alimentation.*

MOTS-CLÉS : politique agricole, Autriche, géographie rurale

KEYWORDS : agricultural policy, Austria, rural geography

## 1. IDEAS AND POLITICAL AIMS COMBINING OR CONCENTRATING THE ECONOMIC AND ECOLOGICAL SPHERES HAVE ALREADY A LONG TRADITION IN AUSTRIA

1977: the introduction of limits for livestock (due to the law on livestock-economy)

1978: the introduction of milk delivery quotas for milk producing enterprises

1982: the ministerial inquiry on the compatibility of economy and ecology in agriculture

1984 : reform efforts within the Austrian market order in strengthening limits of productivity (also 1988 and later on)

1987 : the political declaration of a so-called « socio-ecological » agricultural policy in Austria

1994: the **Austrian programme for an « environmentally protective agriculture »** is part of the negotiations between Austria and the European Union (E.U.)

1995 : propagation of the « Austrian Eco-Land-Concept »

## 2. WITHIN THE FRAME OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS IN AGRICULTURAL POLICY AUSTRIA DECIDED FOR AN ECO-POLITICAL PECULIARITY IN ITS WAY

With the accession to the E.U. agricultural policy in our country changed dramatically. The European market order, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is in force since the beginning of this year. Lower agricultural incomes have to be mastered (resp. compensated). A system of deficiency payments - in a degressive form during 1995 and 1998 - is set in force.

The most important impacts of CAP is the replacement of (former) high producer prices by equalization payments and salaries for renunciation of production (or lowering intensity of production). In general we can sum up : ecological behaviour of farmers can become rewarded by the Austrian state and the E.U.

On the other hand the « World Trade Organization » (WTO, the successor in interest of the « GATT »), is demanding strong liberalization of agricultural markets. For the peculiar agricultural structure of Austria an enforcement of mass production would make no sense - so the transition to high quality production and even to special class products is called for.

Eastern Europe is at the front door of Austria. The consequences of free trade agreements of our neighbour countries or others of the « Newly independent states » with the E.U. are charging Austria's agricultural market first. Therefore it is important to raise our agricultural effectiveness and also to maintain our advantages in production quality. It is very interesting that the demand for so called « biological qualities » of foodstuffs (for touristic or dietetic purposes) is increasing also in our Eastern neighbour countries, while Eastern producers capabilities for supply are yet very limited.

### **3. INTERRELATIONS BETWEEN CHANCES FOR AGRICULTURAL AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND CORRESPONDING POLITICAL TASKS**

What are the contents of « sustainable development » in agriculture and rural areas ? A general view includes the following basic rules for action :

- ecological : all activities are submitted to the aim of most careful treatment and use of natural resources;
- social : all activities and measures must avoid endangering of social security;
- dynamic : the political access to further development in rural areas is preferably based on flexible and problem-oriented approaches than on conservation of natural and cultural structures in a strict sense;
- regional : priority to endogenous development and to the particular needs of the resident population of regions;
- integrative : the comprehensive (or holistic) approach in the performance of political measures.

Prospective ideas of sustainable development in rural areas of Austria are connected with the scope of sustainable development in general. This scope includes :

- the « ecological equalization fonction » of rural areas as regions for the protection of natural life;
- restauration and renewal of villages as an economic element with a key position and capable to introduce innovation in a broad sense;
- sustainable production of raw materials and energy sources;
- the aspect of rural zones as living space with human dimensions or measures and the cultural

landscape as a polyfunctional and « spatial work of art ».

### **4. AUSTRIA IS WILLING TO ACQUIRE A STRONG IMAGE AS A « EUROPEAN ECO-LAND »**

With a new ministerial concept of « Eco-Land » the exemplary role of Austria within European environmental policier might become consolidated. This concept consists of three basic principles

The maintenance of the environment is the central question of survival of mankind.

From the agricultural viewpoint sustainability must become universally valid; this includes also the need of a way out from consumerism to a sustainable society.

The land is in want of agriculture.

That means, that agriculture is necessary not only because of its production function. The cultural landscape is an essential element of the world-wide estimated Austrian rural space, especially for tourism and recreation. Peripheral and exposed regions need agriculture for maintaining their population.

Ecological behaviour must become lucrative.

The profitability of ecological behaviour seems to be a fact since the Austrian agricultural programme for environmental protection became licensed by the E.U.-commission. This programme is able to support agricultural enterprises being ready for minimizing charges on environment and natural resources within their farm-economies, for instance by :

- lowering inputs of fertilizers and agro-chemicals;
- optimizing crop rotation;
- to extensify the production system of the farm.

In individual five-years-obligations or agreements with the authority farmers can choose, whether they prefer :

1. Transformation of the traditional production processes to « biological production ».
2. Extensification of market-crop production
3. Extensification of grassland based production (milk, sommer fattening).

#### 4. Special activities for the maintenance of landscape elements resp. the protection of elements of biodiversity.

Beyond that it would be a very important tasks to find out interrelations between the qualitative transformation of the Austrian agricultural policy and prospective, foreseeable and, in front of all desirable changes in the nutritional behaviour of our population. So it is a fact that the number of « biologically » producing farmers increased from about 400 in 1970 to about 22,000 in the present.

Such an astonishing development is comprising not only impacts in softening the consequences of a considerable regionalization of the agricultural production due to the suitability of Austria's agricultural regions.

It is also an evidence for proceedings in efforts to avoid malnutrition and overnutrition, in which context it would be very useful to work out an Austrian report on impacts of agricultural policy on the nutritional situation of the Austrian population or the adjustment of food production according to health recommendations.

#### 5. CONCLUSION AND CRITICAL REMARKS

The concept of socio-ecological agricultural policy, which has been realised in Austria since 1987, serves as a model at international level : it is the basic of a sustainable agriculture, the principles of which have also been adopted by the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy of the E.U. It aims at realizing an **ecologically responsible and economically efficient agricultural policy** for the farmers and the rural area.

The priorities are :

- further development of economic efficiency;
- ecological orientation;
- remuneration for the conservation of the cultural landscape;
- promotion of production methods in line with nature;
- protection of rural structures;
- promotion of quality;
- income maintenance by means of pluriactivity.

The family farm is the guiding principle of this new agricultural policy, the success of which depends on strategic alliances with other economic groups, in particular with consumers.

It may be a question, in how far the problem of an optimal nutritional status of the population could be met by principles of a sustainable agriculture.

1. We must mention, that the so called « Law of Engel » necessarily cannot remain valid in eternity. Healthful foodstuffs can be and (so the common meaning) must be more expensive as they are in our days : the inhabitants of the Netherlands spend less than 10% of their income for nutrition, Austrians between 10 and 15%.
2. Farmers can achieve very much by cooperation within the frame of a socio-ecological agricultural concept. They can save expenses, they can produce more profitably and without being overburdened and they can get in on higher levels of commercialization and gain more shares of the market.
3. Quality of foodstuffs - this term has different meanings depending on different aspects, agricultural or nutritional. In any case Austria's agriculture is more and more contributing to the consolidation of a very high level of quality production for die supply of our population. The principles of sustainable agriculture cari be and will be useful for that.

#### REFERENCES

- [1] GRIEF, F., 1995, Socio-economic and ecological aspects for sustainable agricultural policy, *Report of the 7th European Nutritional Congress*, Vienna.
- [2] MOLTERER, W., 1995, *Konzept Ökoland Österreich*, Bundesministerium für Land- und Forstwirtschaft, Abt. Öffentlichkeitsarbeit, Wien.

Franz GREIF  
Bundesanstalt für Agrarwirtschaft  
Schweizertalstrasse 36  
1133 WIEN, AUTRICHE