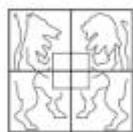


GRUPE D'ECONOMIE
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TRANSPARENCY VICTORIOUS

The French Ministry of Agriculture has started making available comprehensive data on farm subsidies in France, including on the system of single farm payments (SFPs) that will be implemented this year. Previously, only Scotland had provided the public with information on SFPs. France is thus the first European Member State to provide such complete transparency on the distribution of farm subsidies in the past and, even more crucially, in the future.

In September 2005, GEM was the first to lodge a formal request with the *Commission d'Accès aux Documents Administratifs* (CADA) in order to obtain access to information on the beneficiaries of past and future (SPFs) farm subsidies. Ever since, Pierre Boulanger, in charge of the “CAP Efficiency, Equity and Transparency” program at GEM, has published 4 texts in relation with farm subsidies in France.¹ He will soon publish his preliminary results on SFPs. In November 2005, the magazine *Capital* petitioned CADA for the right to have access to the names of the top 100 beneficiaries of farm subsidies in 2004. The French Ministry of Agriculture has made available a first list showing the top 10 recipients of crop and livestock subsidies (20 farms received 8.67 million euros in 2004)—see the GEM website.

These remarkable developments suggest two lessons. Firstly, France is changing, and faster than often believed. Such a move was almost inconceivable a few short months ago, when

¹ The following policy briefs on farm subsidies are available on the GEM website : *The Common Agricultural Policy : Moment of Truth in France?* (November 7th, 2005), *Export Subsidies: an Endangered Species* (December 19th, 2005), *A flood of euros for irrigated fields* (January 9th, 2006), and a working paper (available in French only), *Les réalités de la distribution des subventions agricoles en France* (November 10th, 2005). For an overview at the European level, see: www.farmsubsidy.org.

France looked like the ultimate opponent to any change in farm policy. The idea that an open world does not sound the death knell of French agriculture is gradually making headway with French farmers themselves. A good number of them are beginning to look for an ambitious reform of the Common Agricultural Policy, which will improve both economic efficiency and social and territorial cohesion – and the sooner, the better (for example, it could be with the European budgetary review of 2008-2009). Of course, this is a delicate process which will require more of the kind of political courage that has made these data available.

Secondly, the data on SFPs used by GEM are anonymous. There was some merit in revealing the names of the largest subsidy beneficiaries when the situation looked totally frozen. This time is past. French agriculture is diverse and dynamic enough to host large (indeed, probably larger) farms and small farms (benefiting from appropriate structures). It requires innovative farmers, capable of having long term business plans which will not be under the constant threat of partial and permanent reforms of the CAP, able to make use of the latest genetic discoveries as well as traditional and biological processes, to invest abroad, to think in terms of trademarks and market niches. Such firms already exist. A detailed and rigorous study of farm subsidies will help in better understanding how (and how much) current policies have slowed down the emergence of a new mix of French farms. It will also highlight what needs to be done in order to help bring forth this “new” agriculture in France.

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