

11. Planting New Seeds

Europe pays its 7 million farmers subsidies linked to the amount they produce, a system that has led to massive surpluses. During the 1980s the program generated lakes of wine and mountains of butter that were dumped on the world market, depressing prices and hurting developing countries. The system promoted wealth disparities within Europe, too. Under CAP (Common Agricultural Policy), 80 percent of subsidies go to 20 percent of the largest farms.

The new plan would give farmers a single direct payment based on their earlier subsidies. The reforms are primarily meant to rationalize production by encouraging farmers to grow only what the market demands. But they raise a far more fundamental issue: the role of rural Europe in a 21st-century economy. Fischler's (Europe's commissioner for agriculture) plan isn't so much about cutting costs – he estimates it will save only about €200 million a year – as about transforming the countryside. The 20 percent reduction of subsidies over the next six years will be put toward rural development – which, in addition to creating greener and friendlier farming methods, aims to create new sources of income for rural areas.

Europe's farm lobby resists the idea that its easily romanticized countryside needs to change. Earlier attempts to divert CAP money from agriculture to retraining, tourism and other development schemes have been watered down. But it's becoming increasingly clear that economic diversification is the only way forward for rural Europe, which comprises more than 80 percent of EU territory and 40 percent of its population. Employment in agriculture is falling across the EU: between 1987 and 1997, one in three farming jobs was lost in Italy, Spain, Portugal and France.

Fair enough, but how to revive remote communities faced with high unemployment, an aging population and dwindling public services? The answer, according to European governments and LEADER, the EU's rural development program, can be divided into two broad themes: integration into urban economies or isolation from them. Some areas have courted the global economy, training rural residents to work at call centers or multinationals and using technology to integrate communities into wider global networks. Southern Europe have done precisely the opposite, capitalizing on their distance from urban life through agritourism, the promotion of local crafts, foods or natural beauty.

The reform has also gained new urgency because of European enlargement. The prospect of 10 new states, many with heavy agricultural sectors, set to join the EU in 2004 makes CAP expensive, particularly for the northern European countries that bankroll most of the subsidy scheme. Already, farmers in would-be EU states like Poland and the Czech Republic are worried that with reforms, they'll get a mere fraction of what their Western European colleagues have grown to expect.

In many places, the countryside is already being transformed demographically as stressed-out urbanites search for a bit of peace and quiet. In greenbelts around London, Amsterdam and Paris, commuters have extended the suburbs into rural areas; the British rural population is growing for the first time in 150 years. In Germany, rich urbanites are snapping up half-timbered farmhouses in the Brandenburg countryside around Berlin. Southern France, the coasts of Spain and Portugal and bits of Wales have seen a recent influx of wealthy retired people.

In places like the former farming village of Camaleno, in northern Spain, city dwellers have revived the area by buying up abandoned houses for vacation rentals. But second homes don't help build a rural tax base, a school population or a community spirit.

To combat the problem, some countries have begun programs to encourage urbanites to settle down in the country. The Finns offer support and subsidies to second-home owners who choose to stay at their vacation homes year-round. In Ireland and Spain, NGOs are starting rural resettlement projects, encouraging less prosperous city dwellers to relocate to the country. In 1990, Jim Connolly set up the Rural Resettlement Initiative, funded by the Irish government, to ease Dublin overcrowding and provide an employment pool for deprived rural areas.

What will really draw city dwellers to the country, of course, are jobs. In England, many multinationals are shifting operations to rural areas. Science parks and biotech companies have begun to pop up in former farmlands around Cambridge.

Whole-purpose-built industry towns have sprung up in fields. In eastern Ireland, Intel bought a former horse farm, invested €3.2 billion and turned a green field into the company's largest manufacturing site outside America.

Of course, not every rural region has the luck of the Irish, whose English-language skills, high educational level and good transport links helped create the so-called Celtic Tiger boom. „The EU authorities keep telling us to turn our farms into rural houses for tourism and ecological production, but this is very hard for people who have got a very elementary education,” says Eduardo Navarro, general secretary of Spain's agricultural union. Only 2.5 percent of farmers in Spain have university degrees.

So in many places activists are encouraging locals to play to their strengths. In central Sicily they have given courses on Web design and rug making, and have funneled Brussels money into grants for apricot and cherry trees. They encourage villagers to focus on the things they do well: working with ceramics and glass, and making pasta and cakes. „What we can offer is something cities can't. It's about quality, not quantity.”

If Fischler's reforms pass those who choose to continue farming will have to adopt the same mantra. Brussels subsidies will not reward huge, intensive farms so much as green ones. Farmers will have to preserve what Europe doesn't want to lose, be it pristine landscapes or local specialty cheeses. Even as the economic reality changes, some parts of the countryside may benefit from staying the same.

Első feladat

Olvassa el a „Planting new seeds” című cikket, és egészítse ki a táblázatot a megadott példa (0) szerint.

| | Methods of helping the farmers | Results in production | Effects on the society | Effects on the economy |
|------------|-----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|------------------------------|
| CAP | 0. subsidies linked to the production volume | 1. | 2. | 3. |
| CAP reform | 4. | 5. | 6. | Market forces will dominate |
| Farm lobby | 7. | | Helping employment | 8. |
| LEADER | 9. | | | 10. |
| | | | | and capitalize on urban life |

| Countries | Transforming the countryside |
|-------------------|------------------------------------|
| In Germany | by buying half timbered farmhouses |
| In South France | 11. |
| In Northern Spain | 12. |
| In Finland | 13. |
| In Ireland | 14. |
| In England | 15. |

Második feladat

Olvassa el újra a szöveget és döntse el, hogy az állítások igazak vagy hamisak, a példa (0) szerint.

| | Statements | True | False |
|-----------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|-------|
| 0. | Employment in agriculture is decreasing in the EU. | X | |
| 16. | Inlarging the EU in 2004 will increase the CAP costs | | |
| 17. | Second home and vocational rental owners contribute to tax base. | | |
| 18. | In Ireland subsidies are given to rural areas to help employment. | | |
| 19. | ’Celtic Tiger boom’ means agricultural boom. | | |
| 20. | Fischler’s reforms are against intensive farming. | | |