

Project : "Farmers' access to education and training activities"

FAETA - Farmers' access to education and training activities

Policy brief

to be addressed to the European Commission in order to take measures in response to problems identified during the implementation of FAETA project on ensuring the access of workers in agriculture to education and training activities, in order to adapt them to changes in the employment

Outline of the proposals to improve the vocational training of workers in agriculture

During the 11 months of implementing the project "Farmers access to education and training activities", the partners involved dealt with the situation in vocational education and training of workers in agriculture and developed the following proposals for the European dialogue highlighting the need to adapt them to changes in the employment.

European agricultural sector plays an essential role in influencing the health of the rural economy. It contributes to the achievement of the European Strategy 2020's priorities. The agricultural sector, a key component of the European economy, is permanently changing due to technological development and intervening policies. The need for professional training is obvious, especially after the agricultural map of Europe was redrawn following the EU enlargement in 2004 and 2007.

One of the major challenges confronting the persons engaged in agriculture is the aging process and the limited number of young people willing to manage a farm, to start small businesses in agriculture or to simply work in this sector. Under these circumstances, it will be hard to maintain and develop a prosperous agricultural sector. This especially holds for Eastern European countries which have experienced deficiencies regarding the value of economic production.

Another important challenge is the lack of motivation and awareness of the importance of continuous education and training. Both, agricultural employers and employees do not sufficiently pursue the lifelong development of knowledge, skills and competences. But this is necessary for the individual development of farmers and farm workers as well as for the successful economic persistence.

From the total European work force, 5% work in agriculture. The occupation of a farmer or farm worker requires exercising a wide variety of skills: traditional competences, associated with technical knowledge, in using Information and Communication Technology to support production and marketing efforts, as well as knowledge of land management and environment. In the last years, farmers were asked to add food safety among the skills including animals' health and welfare. In order for farmers to respond to all these requirements and to adapt to the present and future needs of employment, it is necessary to renew their skills continually.



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Furthermore, the context of the global economic crisis and economic changes of the recent years requires an adjustment of employment measures. In order to perform at high levels, the workforce in each economic sector needs specific skills and competences to respond to these changes.

In response to this regrettable situation, we present the following demands to the European decision makers:

We want a better access to education, an initial and on-going continued training for workers in agriculture so trainees receive good working and living conditions. This means adequate wages and working hours to guarantee social integration in the social environment as well as an occupational image that does not lead to social exclusion. All degrees and qualifications awarded by the EU member countries must be comparable.

This means:

- Everybody has to have the right and the possibility to attend a qualified vocational education and training. Vocational education must be free and training in agricultural companies decently paid;
- Initial training has to fulfil broad basic qualifications (acquired in two years) and with the possibility to specialize (acquired in one year). Here, theoretical and practical training must be closely entwined. The quality of training facilities (schools, farms, companies, etc.) has to be regulated and maintained.
- Vocational education and training has to ensure the sustainability of qualifications and the maintenance of workforce. Besides necessary technical (specific to agriculture sector), personal competences (i.e. team work, independence, reflexivity, etc) have to be considered in the training, too. Furthermore, social (i.e. health and safety issues, collective agreements, labour codes, etc.) and environmental aspects (i.e. nature conservation, waste disposal, purchasing, etc.) have to play a considerably role besides economic contents to do justice to a sustainable vocational educational and training.
- The entire vocational training system has to be embedded in the concept of "lifelong learning". Every employee has the right to develop his/her knowledge and capabilities so they can adapt to development in the labour market and changes in the employment. Therefore, the educational system also has to recognize informally acquired knowledge and capabilities.
- The employer has to support and ensure qualified vocational education and training in the benefit of agriculture workers. One possibility could be the regular payment of a monthly fee into a training/qualification fund on a national or regional level.
- Flexibility in achieving the objectives of the training programs has to be reached (i.e. part-time, resuming after a break, etc).

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- Employees must receive their wages during the continued training program which allows them to live a decent life.
- All social groups must have access to a vocational training program, especially women and youth who are currently the most vulnerable groups with the highest percentage of unemployment rate. The access to education and training programs should be done without any discrimination of gender, social, ethnic, linguistic or religious type.
- Training program and content have to be geared to the social and technological developments of the respective occupations. Social partners have to participate and decide equally on the contents. All training facilities including enterprises (based on a certain number of employees) shall develop long-term business plans for the development of their company, the development of the sector, and the development of the necessary qualifications for future employees. Vocational training programs must adapt to market trends and prepare for the future. If such long-term plans are not implemented sanctions have to follow (i.e. no layoff without a broad justification beyond existing regulation).
- An agricultural job registry listing job offers and job demands can help employers to find suited staff and workers to find employment. Integral part of such a database would be a detailed description of qualifications offered and needed:
- The situation of seasonal workers and day labourers needs to be regulated in a way that grants them equal rights and benefits like regularly employed workers. This includes access to vocational education and training..

We want a legal framework which ensures a formal qualification to 95% of the population. Unqualified employees have to be qualified. For this, unskilled workers must have the opportunity and support to gain experience.

We want the implication and participation of social partners in the entire decision making process in the vocational training system (initial and continued training). This will ensure the fulfilment and satisfaction of employees' justifiable needs.

We want the implication of employees in the decision making processes because of their experience and knowledge. In addition, they have to receive appropriate qualifications so that they can contribute in a good manner to internal decision.

We want the European Commission to encourage the development of a single professional information system that would serve to agriculture sector; to create a database on the labour market situation of the EU countries - Agripass UE;

We want harmonized and binding EU-wide social and environmental standards for working processes and they have to be part of the basic vocational education and training. The harmonization of social standards must be laboured European-wide. Here, the best existing standards have to be used as



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orientation benchmark. An improvement by collective agreements is possible at any time. The following aspect should be paid attention at:

- Continuing training and retraining: every employee has the right to continued training during his career.

The implementation of these demands and measures will automatically contribute to the improvement of occupational image of all agriculture occupations. Consequently, qualified employees can be attracted to agriculture sectors and will remain in the business. All current and future employees have to be empowered to adapt to and to shape the current restructuring of agriculture. Moreover, workers have to be allowed to develop personally as well as vocationally in a self-determined way by means of their qualifications.

We especially asked legislators as well as social partners to create the respective conditions and institutional procedures necessary to implement our demands.

Bucharest, August 27th, 2013

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