

Agriculture

Common Agricultural Policy

European agriculture

- Source of wealth and a guarantee of security in EU
- Members produce enough of the major food types to feed themselves
- EU creates major part of world's milk, butter and wine production
- To achieve high levels of effective agricultural production, member states have undergone tremendous change in their farming practices =
 - **The Second Agricultural Revolution**

The Second Agricultural Revolution

- **1950s** = global population explosion => huge increase in demand for food
- *Large investments* (machinery, irrigation)
- *Chemical inputs* (fertilisers, pesticides)
- *Biotechnology* (genetically improved seeds and animals)
- helped farms to raise the output per unit of a land
- => **continuous growth for next 50 yrs. was secured**
- EU agricultural features:
 - Increasing food production
 - often surpluses
 - Declining farmland area
 - Decreasing employment
- Continual growth was ensured mainly by
 - **Common Agricultural Policy**

Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)

- **Aims:**
 - Secure food supplies for population (consumers) at reasonable prices
 - Expand (increase) agricultural output
 - Increase productivity in agriculture
 - Stabilise prices of agricultural products (fair market prices)
 - Secure farm incomes – to ensure a fair standard of living for the agricultural community

CAP - positives

- Managing food prices
- Controlling food supplies
- Offering grants and subsidies to farmers
- Protecting the environment
- Reducing mass rural depopulation
- Supporting marginal farming
- EU = self-sufficient in:
 - wheat, sugar, barley, butter, beef, cheese, fresh vegetables, chicken, pork, eggs, wine, margarine, milk, potatoes
 - => EU's farmers = among the most productive in the world

CAP - negatives

- Costs became increasingly expensive – 70% of EU budget vs.
- Agriculture contributes to EU's GDP only by 3%.
- More food and drinks were produced than could be sold
 - e.g. food mountains and wine lakes
- Increased productivity has resulted in serious environmental problems (pollution)
 - e.g. nitrates, pesticides and animal waste (manure)
 - e.g. soil erosion ⇔ removing hedgerows and woodland
- Many landscapes suffered
 - e.g. wetlands, meadows
- **Main problems of CAP:**
 - Inefficiency in some markets
 - i.e. wheat or corn production
 - Overproduction of agricultural products
 - e.g. wine lakes
 - Costs for running CAP
 - i.e. very expensive
 - Friction with other trading nations
 - i.e. EU members vs. Ukraine, Romania, etc.
- **Reforms:**
 - Reduce subsidies for farmers
 - Cut output: set-aside/reduce quotas
 - Encourage diversification
 - different crops grown
 - Payments for environmentally efficient methods of farming

Recent EU policies

- **Production controls**
 - ⇔ increasing demand => restricting agricultural production = guaranteed thresholds on cereals only if farmers produce commodities up to a specified quantity
- **Import tariffs**
 - = EU supports trade within Europe and minimises imports from outside => tax on imported food (former colonies)
- **Set-Aside**
 - 7-15% of agricultural land was withdrawn from production vs. few environmental benefits

Farming terms

- **Marginal farming** – where the physical conditions only just make farming economically possible
- **Subsidy** – money given to farmers by the EU to help stay them in business, to support them financially
- **Intervention price** – a guaranteed price given by the EU to the farmer for a farm product (e.g. wheat) vs. EU's budget loss
- **Set-aside** – where farmer is paid compensation by the government for not using some of his land for agricultural purposes
- **Quota** – the amount of farm product that an individual farmer is allowed to produce (e.g. on milk production)
- **Diversification** – variety of farming and non-farming activities that farmers use in order to make a profit

Environmental issues

- **Removal of hedgerows**
 - Farmers removed hedgerows and trees to create larger fields =>
 - increased soil erosion from wind and running water ⇔ hedges = wind-breaks, natural habitat of birds, insects and animals
 - Nowadays farmers have reversed their actions – trimming their hedgerows =>
 - encourage wildlife to flourish (restore, regenerate)
- **Drainage of wetlands**
 - **to create new farmland**
 - Wetlands = transition zones between land and sea where the soil is frequently waterlogged, water is on or near the surface
 - => **disasterous effect upon local wildlife**

- e.g. destroyed tidal sand flats – former breeding and feeding grounds for many species
- **Wetland drainage has been halted by law – wetland conservation sites with aim to recover**

- **Soil erosion**
 - Process that can damage farmland beyond repair and is very difficult to reverse
 - Harmful activities:
 - Overcultivation of land and monoculture (1 type of crop) can impoverish the soil
 - Ploughing up and down hillsides (downslopes) decreases soil fertility and surface run-off
 - Overgrazing exposes land to wind and water erosion
 - Irrigation (without adequate drainage) can cause salinity (salt water) and waterlogging

- **Chemical pollution**
 - Increasing use of chemical fertilisers, animal waste and pesticides reached rivers and public water supplies
 - Each year = 200,000 people die from pesticide poisoning
 - UK, 1995 = 1.5 million people were drinking water contaminated by nitrate fertilisers
 - blue baby syndrome, gastric cancer and birth defects
 - Algal blooming = oxygen starvation, declining biodiversity – in poorly circulating waters
 - Denitrification of water is very expensive

Keywords

- CAP, The Second Agricultural Revolution, global population explosion, continual/continuous growth, food supplies, farm incomes, secure/stabilise prices, grants and subsidies,
- environment, self-sufficient, marginal farming, inefficiency, overproduction, quota, diversification, restriction, set-aside, tariffs, environmental benefits
- nitrates, pesticides, animal waste (manure), soil erosion, hedgerow, woodland, rape seed
- wildlife/wetland conservation, drainage, chemical pollution, overcultivation, overgrazing, monoculture, algal growth, denitrification