



MONITORING THE MEDITERRANEAN STRATEGY FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT(MSSD)

AGRICULTURAL AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT National Study France, Summary

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The French national report, “Agricultural and Rural Development”, drafted within the framework of “Monitoring the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development” (MSSD), was conducted upon request by Plan Bleu in preparation for an international workshop on this topic.

In a first part, the document describes the context and trends of the French agricultural sector and highlights the fact that agriculture plays a major social role in the rural landscape, even though—in economic terms—the share of productive agriculture is on the decrease. Both French and community legal mechanisms constitute the framework for this change.

In a second part, the document addresses the risks attendant upon the trends observed. The stakes and challenges in matter of conservation of natural resources are analysed, as well as the needs of rural population. Besides, the study offers an overview of the international political context set to change over the coming years. Finally, prospective economic alternatives are considered.

The rural-dominated space, composed of municipalities of less than 2000 inhabitants (58.8% of the national territory), may be distributed into 3 groups with unequal assets (“city”-countryside areas, “balance-seeking” areas, “vulnerable” areas). The demographic evolution of these areas is no longer in decline, but one notices an ageing trend, as well as difficulties to maintain proximity services to the population in the rural-dominated space. Agriculture is no longer the prevailing economic activity; industrial employment in the rural sector is, on average, twice higher than that in the agricultural and agri-food sector. While employment capacity in the rural sector is on the increase, it develops at a lower pace than that in urban areas and, on the whole, in relation to jobs requiring a lower level of qualification. The professions related to covering rural population needs account for as much as 50% of rural employment, thus attesting to an increasing tertiarisation of rural economy. Recreation activities report a notable upswing. The countryside ranks second as a tourism space for the French (claiming about 40% of destinations). The institutional and political context is marked by France’s engagement in the “Agenda 21” process, which has incepted the design of a National Strategy for Sustainable Development (SNDD), adjusted in 2006 to be in line with the European Strategy for Sustainable Development (ESSD). Besides, Law N° 2005-157 (dated 23 February 2005), related to the development of rural areas, is the first legislative text dedicated to the rural environment and constitutes, in this regard, a land use planning and development tool intended for the whole range of socio-economic and political actors. The attractiveness of rural areas can be improved, based also on the “Plan de développement rural hexagonal” (French Rural Development Plan) to which a budget of 10.8 billion € was earmarked, of which 5.7 billion € financed by the EU under the rural development settlement 2007-2013 (2nd pillar of the CAP).

The trends observed call for the conservation of natural resources; in addition, the observance of best agricultural practices (19 European directives) is a requirement for the granting of aid. In matter of water, besides the need of safeguarding the quality of the resource, it is necessary to urge for a rationalisation of the quantities used for irrigation (physical improvements or crop practices). The management of inputs and phytosanitary products must rest on close monitoring systems and on envisioning alternative solutions. Agriculture and forestry play a paramount role in relation to climate change not only by offering the possibility of reducing emissions of GHG and of toxic substances—via the improvement of practices—, but also by helping towards their absorption—via optimal use

of soils and resources. These trends must take into consideration biological diversity. The “Grenelle de l’environnement” (Environment Dot Matrix), of late 2007, reaffirmed the prospects for an ecologically productive and competitive agriculture based on the environmental quality of its production methods. The “Grenelle” will translate into incentive and monitoring measures within the few coming months. As regards research and training, a National Plan for Sustainable Agriculture, Sustainable Development (PNADDD) is mainstreamed in technical agricultural training with a view to enhancing the skills of secondary/tertiary level learners in matter of sustainable development. The progress of ICTs is set to boost the attractiveness of rural areas.

The trends observed as regards the typology of farms reveal a specialisation of the structures (dominant agricultural activity: 52.2% of the labour force, 74.2% of the UFS, 74.3% of the MBS). To sustain these production means, the commercialisation structures in France are characterised by the specificity of the agricultural cooperatives and the development of producer organisations, particularly in the fruits and vegetables sector. Risk management in agriculture is sustained by State intervention in matter of protection against climate hazards (agricultural disaster and crop insurance). Agricultural economy—via the development and optimisation of the use of biomass, bio-fuels, bio-energies and bio-materials—is encouraged within the framework of the actions started in 2004. The policy of optimisation of food quality based on identification labels of product quality and origin—now reporting increasing success—is sustained by support for the designation of origin (Guaranteed Designation of Origin (AOC), Protected Geographical Indication (IGP), ...), as well as for bio-labels which represent a key economic lever. In this regard, the “Institut National des Appellations d’Origine” (National Institute of Origin Designation) organises the delivery of identification labels. In order to ensure the development of organic farming, France has implemented a range of policies (LOA (Organic Law on Agriculture) 2006 and tax credit, FEADER support within the framework of MAE – maintenance and conversion, PDRH “quality” support, extension credits, Bio Agency). These measures are due to be reinforced within the framework of the “Organic Farming 2012” action plan (Grenelle de l’environnement).