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**Protecting our landscape –  
A contribution from Rural Development**

*Check Against Delivery  
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi  
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort*

10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the EEA (European Environment Agency)

**25 November 2004**

**Dear colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is a great pleasure for me to be with you today at this conference and I would like to thank the organisers for their kind invitation. I have to admit, today is a special day for me for two reasons. First of all, I am very privileged to celebrate the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the European Environment Agency with you, here in my home country, and also as this is my first official speech as Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development.

Agriculture and forestry remain the main land users in the enlarged EU. That's why these sectors play an important role in the management of the natural resources in rural areas. An important asset of rural areas is the richness of their landscapes. They bear the form and composition of a farming heritage. This legacy is evident in many diverse features, such as the pattern and size of fields, the extent and type of grasslands, the existence of landscape features, and the use of terracing, cropping rotations, and settlement patterns.

Maintaining these assets serves environmental objectives. This entails conserving farming habitats and the related biodiversity. It also involves favouring specific models of land management, which contributes to the preservation of the natural resources such as soil and water. But preserving rural landscapes is not only a matter of environmental preferences, it is also a key element in citizens' perception of quality of life in rural areas. Thus the ecological integrity and the scenic value of landscapes are important elements in developing the long-term economic potential in rural areas. Just think of it, how essential they are for making rural areas attractive for the establishment of enterprises, for places to live, and for the tourist and recreation businesses.

The EU Common Agricultural Policy, CAP, contributes with a range of measures to the protection and improvement of the landscape, particularly under the rural development policy. I will expand on that in the first part of my speech.

In addition, there are a number of projects that support environmental objectives which involve a close cooperation between the European Commission and the European Environmental Agency, which I want to concentrate on in the second part.

In particular since 1992, the CAP has increasingly been influenced by environmental and biodiversity concerns. A basic idea is that the role performed by farming in Europe is not simply agricultural production but also includes provision of "public goods". By this I mean the conservation of land and soil, the maintenance of landscapes and the management of habitats favouring biodiversity conservation. On this basis, the CAP is increasingly aimed at delivering benefits to the wider society in the shape of environmental protection.

A range of CAP measures, particularly under the rural development policy, contribute to sustainable agriculture. Key measures are the agri-environmental measures and the compensatory allowances for Less Favoured Areas and Natura 2000 sites. Furthermore, the 2003 CAP reform has added other instruments such as the use of farm advisory services by the farmers.

Let me offer a few remarks on the future rural development policy for 2007-2013. I believe that several elements of the proposal now on the table will further strengthen the cooperation between the Agency and DG Agriculture.

There will now be a stronger focus on three areas:

Firstly, competitiveness of agriculture and forestry;

Secondly, land management and environment; and,

Thirdly, wider rural development.

All three contain a reinforced environmental dimension, but for the second area it is clearly of utmost importance. As I said initially, farming and forestry remain of overriding importance for land use and the management of natural resources in the EU's rural areas.

Moreover, the importance of the second axis is reflected by allocating the highest share of Community funding to these programmes: that is 25%.

In terms of environment and land management the objectives and priorities to be set out in the EU-strategic guidelines will certainly address the activities under the Sixth Community Environment Action Programme. They will also reflect the European Council conclusions regarding the Sustainable Development Strategy.

Let me just recall the key issues: Climate change, nature and biodiversity, in particular Natura 2000, water and soil, ammonia emissions and sustainable use of pesticides.

In almost all these areas the EEA has produced substantial work on indicators to measure changes and pressures, also in relation to our policy instruments.

This information has provided important arguments to better integrate environmental concerns in the Common Agricultural Policy, for example feeding into last year's reform and most recently into our proposal for Rural Development.

A task of huge interest for DG Agriculture is also the development and implementation of European 2010 Biodiversity-related Indicators to monitor progress and help achieve the pan-European target of ending biodiversity loss by 2010. It is imperative that we live up to the Malahide Commitments.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Let me now come to the good cooperation between the Commission and the European Environmental Agency.

There are numerous projects on-going between the two. I would like to mention especially the IRENA and the cross compliance indicators projects, as well as to some reports provided by the EEA.

As regards the IRENA project, its main objective is to develop agri-environmental indicators to monitor the integration of environmental concerns into the Common Agricultural Policy.

The spatial dimension in the analyses related to the environmental sustainability of agriculture is particularly interesting. Spatially differentiated information is indispensable for having an accurate picture of the development of local farming systems and structures, like livestock densities, crop types and rotations. It also helps to define natural characteristics of the local environment, such as climate, soil or water resources availability.

Spatial tools are particularly relevant for making different kinds of data useful for environmental reporting. This leads me to the CORINE Land Cover database, presented last Thursday in Brussels. DG Agriculture follows with strong interest this important EEA work. The inventories made are extremely valuable for us to monitor and assess agricultural and rural landscapes and their development over time.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Let me now turn to the second project between the Commission and the EEA: the farm management and cross compliance indicators project.

This project allows farmers to assess the extent to which their farming practices meet the cross compliance requirements on the environment. In particular this study is meant to provide guidance for the "Farm Advisors" on:

- How to identify the land and farm management practices to be adopted by a farmer; and
- How to assess the level of achievement of the environmental cross-compliance requirements.

I can promise you that the results will be of great relevance to the work of DG Agriculture.

The European Commission and the EEA also have mutual interest in identifying the farming systems and areas of farmland which support a high biodiversity and which have a special link to agricultural habitats, the so-called high nature value farmland areas.

And last but not least: We have welcomed the recent EEA report on "Agriculture and the environment in the EU accession countries" which main results were presented in Brussels, in March this year.

Agriculture is in fact a key to the protection of the environment in the new Member States of the European Union. The report provides an excellent insight into the pressures from agriculture on essential resources such as water, soil and air. It also shows the importance of agricultural management for biodiversity and landscapes as large areas of farmland of high nature value are present.

We will follow with attention the EEA work on approaches and methodologies for assessing environmental integration, with particular focus on governance and institutional arrangements at European level.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

As you could see the integration of environmental concerns into the CAP is a dynamic process.

But it is not only a question of monitoring the impact of agricultural policy into the environment. Our task is more and more to find ways of designing policy instruments that takes into account the necessity to protect and enhance the agricultural environment.

We have to work more and more upstream in the design of policies – rather than to correct mistakes when they have occurred.

This implies a careful relationship between those who design and implement the policies and those who collect data, monitor and assess environmental trends.

We do need the help, support, expertise and collaboration of the EEA in the coming years.

So many happy returns and thank you for your attention.