Encouraging Collective Farmers' Marketing Initiatives –
Insights into the Strategies and Impacts of Farmers’ Collective Action

Final Conference, 8 May 2008, Brussels

Research Teams
WU Wageningen University, Rural Sociology Group, Netherlands
FiBL Forschungsinstitut für biologische Landwirtschaft, Switzerland
QAP Decision, France
IfLS Institut für Ländliche Strukturforshung an der J.W. Goethe Universität, Germany
IU Innsbruck University, Centre for Mountain Agriculture, Austria
BSC Baltic Studies Center, Latvia
CRPA Research Centre on Animal Production, Italy
AU Faculty of Agricultural Sciences, Aarhus University, Denmark
IPS Institute for Political Sciences, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Hungary
CUA Czech University of Agriculture in Prague, Czech Republic

Background
Collective action by farmers has played an important role in the history of European agriculture and rural development. Joint actions such as marketing co-operatives and study groups have contributed to better market access, increased farm incomes and regional employment and the spread of sustainable production methods.

European agriculture now faces a range of new challenges, such as a gradual loss of farmers’ control over supply chains and a general decline in, and reorientation of, policy support. At the same time, there is a need to respond to changing demands for food safety, quality and an attractive countryside. Collective action may also help in finding appropriate responses to these new challenges.

Against this background the EU-funded COFAMI project has studied the role of collective farmers’ marketing initiatives (COFAMIs) in finding appropriate responses to changing market and policy conditions. The results show that new collective initiatives of farmers are emerging throughout Europe in response to these challenges. Examples include farmers’ groups that: jointly produce specialty or organic products; collectively promote and market regional foods; make joint investments in bioenergy production; develop new forms of producer-consumer co-operation; and collectively supply services (tourism, care, etc) or public goods (landscape, water management).

The conference presents key results of the COFAMI research, which has been carried out since September 2005. Eighteen case studies in 10 countries provide insights into the different strategies employed by the initiatives and the factors that limit and enable their establishment and development. The COFAMI project has also assessed the impact and contribution of these initiatives to sustainable rural development, and through two rounds of stakeholder and expert consultation has developed a set of recommendations for support strategies and policy measures to further enhance the performance of COFAMIs.

We invite you to participate in this conference on May 8. It will provide a platform for stimulating discussion between researchers, policy makers and stakeholders on the potential of collective farmers’ actions in addressing the challenges facing European agriculture and rural areas as well as possible strategies and measures to support them.

For further information on the project:
www.cofami.org
Provisional Conference programme

9.00 Welcome and opening by the Chairperson

9.15 The role of COFAMIs within the European Model of Agriculture
   Key speaker from European Commission or EU Parliament

10.00 The diversity of COFAMIs across Europe and challenges they face
   Henk Renting (COFAMI)

10.45 Coffee break
   With Poster presentations of COFAMI cases

11.30 Factors that limit and enable the development of COFAMIs
   Markus Schermer (COFAMI)
   Discussant: Christine Rudmann (EU Project “Entrepreneurial Skills of Farmers”)

12.45 Lunch Buffet
   With tasting of COFAMI products

13.45 COFAMIs’ contribution to sustainable rural development
   Key speaker (COFAMI) or workshops

14.30 Policies and strategies to support COFAMIs
   Karlheinz Knickel (COFAMI)
   Key speaker from farmers’ organisation
   Key speaker from a policy background

15.15 Coffee Break

15.45 Round table discussion on Support strategies for COFAMIs
   With representatives from the DGs for Agriculture and Research, farmers’ organisations (COPA-COGECA, CEJA), COFAMI initiatives, COFAMI researchers

16.45 Concluding remarks
   Henk Renting (COFAMI)

17.00 Close of meeting

Registration

The number of participants is limited to 100. Registration will be on a first-come, first-served basis.

Registration should be confirmed before 30 April 2008 by sending your name, address and institution to: heidrun.moschitz@fibl.org, entering “COFAMI registration” in the subject line.

Meeting venue

Félicien Cattier room
Fondation Universitaire Stichting
Egmontstraat 11,
1000 Bruxelles

Hotel accommodation

Information is available on:
http://www.brussels.org
http://www.bnb-brussels.be

Attendance to the seminar is free of charge. A buffet lunch will be provided to all participants. Participants are responsible for their own travel and hotel costs.