

In Touch

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EU SUBSIDY LOST IN SMOKE

Did you know that more than half a million European citizens die each year from diseases related to smoking?

Did you know that British and European taxpayers (EU Member States) pay £1bn to our governments to advertise the dangers of smoking and then pay a further £10bn to treat, in our hospitals, fellow citizens who suffer from smoking-related diseases?

Did you know that despite these facts, the European Commission offers, from our EU contribution, a subsidy of £750m, mainly to Greek & Italian tobacco farmers, to produce almost 75% of the EU's tobacco output of 350,000 tons?

Did you know that the subsidy per hectare for tobacco is £5300 compared to only £270 for arable crops and £430 for fruits and vegetables?

Syndicates of tobacco farmers in Northern Greece, local authorities and Greek political parties make full use of the funding available through the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). A substantial part of the subsidy ends up in the coffers of political parties and politicians who fight hard to retain the EU subsidy. The Greek government claims that many villages depend on income from tobacco and that without it there would be political instability in areas that border Macedonia, Bulgaria and Turkey.

Why should the majority of non-smoking European citizens subsidise tobacco farmers, pay for government adverts against smoking and pay even more for hospital treatment for fellow citizens who choose to smoke?

I believe that EU tobacco farmers should, under the reformed CAP, be given financial assistance for a limited period of time in order to help them grow alternative crops suited to their climate. EU subsidies must not be used to finance political parties or politicians. OLAF (the EU Inspectors) must investigate

and publish its findings on how these subsidies have been disbursed in the last 5 years.

REFORM OF CAP

Reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is due to be agreed before September 2004. It is expected to offer compensation based on historic payments for animals and regionalised average payments (RAP) for crops. A hybrid version could offer compensation for 90% of the animals on a historic value with 10% on a regionalised average value. Compensation for crops, on RAP will be about £200/ha for cropland and £20/ha for grassland.

The reform of the CAP, including the decoupling of production subsidy, will enable our farmers to renew and regenerate rural areas and switch to 'organic' production of high quality food.

Sale of organic food increased by 55% per annum between 1993-1998 and 30% since 1999. Some of the accession countries e.g. Czech Republic and Hungary, with established inspection systems, already export organic food to the EU whilst other countries, like Slovakia and Bulgaria, offer good possibility of low cost production.

How can we boost the production, processing, trade and consumption of organic food in the EU? How can we ensure traceability and organic authenticity of the food we buy? How can organic farming co-exist with conventional and genetically modified agriculture?

With responsible management, it will also enable approved GM crops to be planted using either low pollen varieties or by creating pollen barriers to prevent cross-pollination. With appropriate private liability laws and insurance schemes to cover accidental admixture of GM and non-GM crops, farmers should be able to earn more from a wider range of crops. Direct marketing of GM or organic products, using distinctive packaging, will enhance consumer confidence.

NORFOLK CURE FOR BRASSICAS

A group of ingenious and experienced farmers have recognised the value of garlic to cure the problem of cabbage root fly damage to brassica crops. They have formulated a product, based on garlic extract, that will virtually eliminate the need for using Chlorpyrifos (synthetic chemicals) for non-root brassica modules and the very expensive mesh cover to protect root brassicas from damage done by eggs and larvae of the cabbage root fly.

A number of farmers have successfully used the product and results have been analysed by UK universities and scientific and agricultural research institutes. A provisional approval has been recommended by the Pesticide Safety Directorate (PSD) pending approval by DEFRA's Advisory Committee on Pesticides (ACP).

The patented formulation, if approved as a bio-pesticide, will be useful not only against cabbage root fly but also against slug and flea beetle damage. It will be most welcome by organic farmers and should have a ready market in the EU.

I am delighted to have been invited by the farmers to support their case for approval before the UK regulatory authority – it seems that bureaucracy, wherever it is, finds every excuse to interfere with innovation and enterprise!

TO FISH OR NOT TO FISH

Every other cod in the sea is fished illegally. Over-fishing has depleted North Sea fish stocks and a new Government Report warns that 13,000 jobs could be lost if the EU does not take appropriate action. "Administrative" fines and confiscation of licences are suggested to overcome illegal fishing and it is anticipated that local managers will manage EU fish stocks on a regional basis.

A proposal to scrap 13% of the cod, haddock, plaice (whitefish) fleet and a four year tie up of a further 30% of the fleet, funded by the fishing industry, will be disastrous for our fishermen. Mr. Ben Bradshaw, the UK Fisheries Minister, claims that mackerel, herring and shellfish make up 60% of the industry turnover and generates most profit. Tradeable quotas, successfully used in Iceland and New Zealand, may be introduced from 2006 to make fishing more profitable, although such a system favours larger businesses and squeezes out small operators affecting rural fishermen.

The EU's implementation of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) has failed our fishermen because it cannot control continental fishermen exceeding their quotas; has no sustainable policy on re-stocking and offers no solution for undersized fish that have to be

thrown back into the sea. The CFP should be scrapped and the UK should insist on repatriation of fishing policy to Member States so that we can better manage and secure the livelihood of our fishermen. Finally, I am delighted to report that EU Fisheries ministers did agree that, from June 2005 in the North Sea and the Baltic and in 2006 in the Celtic sea and western Channel, fishermen using boats longer than 12 metres will have to fit "pingers" to fixed nets to warn off dolphins and porpoises.

EU PENALISES WOMEN DRIVERS

Annual car insurance premiums for women will rise by up to £500 pounds following a vote in the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

Although Conservative MEPs fiercely opposed the vote, British Labour & Liberal Democrat MEPs supported continental socialists, liberals and greens to opt for "equal" treatment for men and women, thereby forcing Insurance companies to charge higher premiums for women in future!

Annual car insurance premiums for women, according to the Association of British Insurers, will now rise by up to £500.

Insurance companies calculate premiums by assessing risk of different categories of drivers. They assess women drivers as safer on the basis that women tend to drive more slowly, for shorter distances and have lower annual mileages.

This vote is an example of EU interference in business that neither creates jobs nor offers value for money for European taxpayers. Furthermore, it does nothing to enhance equal opportunities for women in other areas such as breaking the "glass ceiling" in securing top jobs or participation in national politics.

ACTIVITIES

2 Apr	W. Suffolk CA Wine & Cheese, Worlington
3 Apr	Public Meeting: J. Gummer MP, Halesworth
15 Apr	Stowmarket constituents visit Brussels
17 Apr	W.I. Meeting, Kesgrave
17 Apr	Canvass for Felixstowe South by-election
20 Apr	Constituents visit to Strasbourg Parliament
23 Apr	"Take your MEP to School" Day, Cromer
23 Apr	Canvass with Iain Dale, North Norfolk PPC
23 Apr	N. Norfolk CA : Supper meeting, Blakeney
24 Apr	Norwich North CA Fish & Chip Night
29 Apr	Waveney CA Wine & Cheese Evening
30 Apr	11.00am Norfolk W.I. Question Time
30 Apr	3.00pm Canvass with Norwich South PPC
1 May	Markets:09.00 Wymondham/12.00 Elveden
7 May	19.00 Downham Market CA
8 May	Markets:09.00 Swaffham/12.00 Kings Lynn

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