Committee of Professional Agricultural Organisations
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General Confederation of Agricultural Co-operatives
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COPA/COGECA position on water scarcity and drought[1]

[1] For more information on qualitative water aspects, please see on the WFD and good ecological status/good ecological potential http://www.copa-cogeca.be/pdf/pr_06_35f_1e.pdf

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COPA/COGECA position on water scarcity and drought

Introduction

1. Water is an essential production factor in our sector, and as it is intrinsically linked to the future of European agriculture, sustainable water management is an absolute priority. COPA-COGECA, representing European farmers and their cooperatives, welcomes the initiative of the European institutions to address the separate but interrelated phenomena of water scarcity and droughts.

Challenges that sets the scene for agriculture in Europe

2. Water is the basis for life and much of the impacts of climate change will be felt through water-related consequences.

3. Imbalances between availability and demand will most likely be exacerbated by climate change, and, like access to energy, water management is becoming one of the main geostrategic challenges of the 21st century. It conditions the access to raw materials required for food production and by industry, for the development of tourism and for the vitality of streams, rivers and waterways. The capability to provide sufficient water resources, to properly organise their distribution and optimise their use will be one of the keys to Europe's future competitiveness.

4. All human activity inevitably influences the environment. The farming community, being the managers of more than half of the EU's land, is particularly aware of this fact and therefore, taking its responsibility, contributes to an EU model of sustainable agriculture which is unparalleled in the world.

5. While working hard to improve the environmental performance and to limit the adverse pressure on natural resources farmers and their cooperatives are also concerned with maintaining their positive contribution to the over-arching EU objectives for sustainable development and growth and jobs, as pronounced in the Lisbon agenda.

6. At the heart of the CAP is the European model of agriculture,[2] which supports a multifunctional and sustainable agriculture spread throughout the European Union. COPA-COGECA recalls the commitment of the Council to this model, last confirmed at the Informal Ministerial in Oulu 2006.

7. The fundamental objectives laid down in the founding Treaty of Rome, such as secure supplies of food at affordable prices, underscore farmers' vital role in society. Today's EU agriculture is producing food, feed, fiber and fuel under the highest standards in the world for environmental protection, complemented by animal welfare and food safety provisions. We are proud of our sustainable production but it is a tall order to meet the ever-increasing list of demands from society, in particular in the context of the huge pressure on the farming sector from ongoing WTO negotiations and potential cuts in EU funding. This only underlines the necessity to maintain the viability of the European farms and policy-makers are strongly urged to take caution in their actions not to create the straw that breaks the camel's back.

[2] For more information, please see COPA-COGECA's memorandum on the future development of the European Model of Agriculture [PR(06)116F1/P(06)117F1]

Water use in agriculture - water efficiency and irrigation

8. Food, much like drinking water, is a basic human need and as such agricultural production must be given priority.

9. Agriculture is one of the main water uses in Europe, in particular in the southern Member States. In this context it is necessary to consider the geographical and sectoral differences which exist within the EU. The situation regarding water abstraction and consumption varies widely across Europe due to *inter alia* different climatic conditions. Southern European countries use the largest percentages for agriculture, whereas energy production, industry and public water supply are the main users in most of Central and North Europe. On average, as far as water abstraction is concerned, 44% is used for energy production, 24% for agriculture, 17% for public water supply and 15% for industry. As regards water consumption on aggregated EU level, 69% is used for agricultural production, 13% for public water supply, 10% for industry and 8% for energy production.[3]

10. COPA COGECA calls for a prudent use of data and definitions, and given the recent publications by the Commission, cautions against the use of potentially misleading figures and/or terminology.[4]

11. Irrigation is the most significant water use in agriculture, especially in southern countries where climatic conditions lead to imbalances between rainfall and crop evapotranspiration during parts of the year.

12. Being at the centre of attention for the agricultural use of water, it is necessary to elaborate on the different aspects of irrigation in Europe.

13. Firstly, the upward trend for use of water for irrigation has slowed down in several countries during recent years. With the recent reforms of the CAP, which is to an ever greater extent based on decoupling, the link between payments and production volumes has been broken and consequently CAP is not a driver for increased water abstraction.

14. Secondly, irrigated agriculture is a more productive and stable system than dry farming in southern regions. It provides also the possibility of growing other crops and so to avoid monoculture practices. Diversity of crop production systems is linked to high competitiveness and stable incomes. Without the centuries old traditional practice of irrigation, production of certain agricultural commodities would simply not be possible in the south of the EU. Consequently, the practice indirectly affects down-stream industry in the food supply chain and as such the stability and growth of local and regional economies.

15. Thirdly, irrigated agriculture in drought-stricken areas also helps prevent land abandonment and soil erosion (plant cover in dry areas helps protect the soil against erosion induced by either heavy rainfalls or wind). It maintains humid habitats with great biodiversity values. Irrigation areas also reduce the risk of forest fires, and in this context the strong correlation between drought periods and the occurrence of forest fires must be highlighted.

16. Irrigating at optimum level ensures the right quality of produce and increases the yield of quality produce, reducing crop wastage and therefore water wastage.

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[3] Second interim report on water scarcity and droughts, June 2007, European Commission, p. 16-17

[4] As an example, the figure attributed to agriculture for water abstraction on page 11 in the impact assessment [SEC(2007)993] is incorrect and should be corrected

17. Using water wisely is a priority for European farmers and, recognising their role as essential players in ensuring sustainable and efficient management of water resources, they are engaging in optimization of water management, as well as increased cooperation with other operators. This type of commitment is illustrated by investments in more efficient irrigation systems, use of new technologies (e.g. soil moisture sensors) to better match irrigation with plant needs, and good agricultural practices (such as scheduling of irrigation during night to reduce evaporation).

18. In fact, water use efficiency in agriculture is improving every year. In many Member States the modernization of irrigation systems has already progressed, nevertheless, water saving potential exists wherever older systems prevail.

19. A switch to irrigation systems with higher efficiency levels (sprinkler and drip irrigation) is conditioned by a number of factors. For example, certain systems suit better certain crops and, ultimately it is a matter of costs. The cost of implementing pressure irrigation could far exceed the productive capacity of the areas where it would be applied (costs have been calculated to approx. €10 000/ha).[5] RDR Axis 1 measures can be used to help facilitate the transition and should be carried out on the basis of analysis of regional characteristics.

20. Considering agriculture's central role and the aim to promote a modern, sustainable European agriculture, COPA-COGECA calls on the EU institutions to:

- make the most of the potential in the 7th research framework programme to answer to the need for crop varieties more resilient to extreme weather conditions and events. Equally the development and deployment of cost-efficient systems and technologies for irrigation (such as high-tech monitoring instruments like sensors and IT-tools to adjust the timing and the volume irrigated to plant needs e.g.) are key to further improved water use efficiency.
- Optimise the tool-kit under the EU policy framework (incentive structures for the promotion of water-efficient devices and practices, advisory services, training and education, sharing of best practice etc.)

The EU policy framework – recent CAP reforms and an outlook to the future

21. CAP measures, and in particular their implementation through the tailored rural development programmes can facilitate contributions to solutions for water management at different levels – improving water use efficiency, motivating the use of crops and technologies well adapted to situations of scarcity or supporting the development of new farming water supplies like irrigation networks and reservoirs.

22. We find that budget allocation must match the objectives and we deplore the fact that the allocation of funding for rural development in the agreement on the financial perspective 2007-2013 was much lower than initially proposed. It has lead to a situation where the second Pillar of the CAP is asked to do more with less money.

23. At the same time, in a global and competitive world the direct payments are essential to ensure the viability of sustainable agriculture, delivering environmental services to the benefit of society.

24. The reform of 2003 started to be implemented in 2005 and is as a matter of fact still ongoing.[6] COPA-COGECA recalls the radical reforms of the CAP in the last years and emphasis the need for stability and consolidation.

[5] EEA report nr 19, *Sustainable water use in Europe*, 2001, p. 27

[6] Recent and upcoming reforms: fruit and vegetables CMO, wine CMO and cotton CMO.

25. COPA-COGECA is of the opinion that the Health Check is and must remain a primarily technical exercise to review and validate existing CAP instruments.

26. We insist the European institutions refrain from one-dimensional approaches and address the issue of water management in the overall context of assessment of the future of agriculture and corresponding policy framework, in particular for the scenario beyond 2013.

27. COPA-COGECA supports the principle behind the cross-compliance instrument, however, the current system is flawed by its degree of complexity and high costs. COPA-COGECA has come forward with suggestions how to simplify the system and supports the current revision by the Council.[7] In relation to a potential inclusion of water management provisions under cross-compliance, COPA-COGECA finds it practically unfeasible, since the WFD implementation has not reached the stage where the programmes of measures are known. It would moreover run counter to the efforts made at Council level to streamline the system under the flag of simplification.

The Water Framework Directive (WFD) as the tool to handle qualitative and quantitative water issues

28. The WFD quite rightly is described as the flagship legislation of EU water policy. It was adopted against a backdrop of consensus for concerted action using a single piece of legislation to replace the previous fragmented approach.

29. Qualitative deterioration of water resources has consequences also for availability of water resources, and more importantly explicit quantitative considerations can be tackled within the WFD and its tool-box.[8] There is an explicit requirement to meet good quantitative status for groundwater and good ecological status for all surface waters. Even though water resources considerations only feature as a supporting element for good ecological status the quantity of water has a huge bearing on:

- water quality in surface waters by the ability of the water to dilute any discharges or pollutants and therefore will be evident in ecological or chemical status;
- ability of Article 7 to be met by influencing the ability of clean surface or groundwaters to dilute any potential contaminants;
- occurrence of saline or other intrusions which can be induced in areas 'overabstracted', which can affect groundwater chemical and quantitative status as well as surface water ecological status;
- the condition of Natura 2000 sites as designated under the Birds and Habitats Directives, which are classed as protected areas under the Water Framework Directive.

The objectives of the WFD would not be achieved without explicit consideration of water resources. COPA-COGECA does not see the need to create a separate quantitative daughter Directive, spawned by the WFD, as it would obviously overlap existing legislation and go against better regulation, streamlining and simplification.

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[7] For more detailed information, please see the full COPA-COGECA position on technical simplification of the CAP https://agriinfo.copa-cogeca.be/DOC/PR19F1E.htm

[8] WFD, Article 1 (sustainable use), 4 (environmental objectives and balance between abstraction and recharge), 11 (programmes of measures) and 13 (drought management plans and supplementary detailed programmes can be developed within RBMPs, ensuring an integrated approach to quantitative and qualitative water management aspects).

30. As far as water pricing is concerned, Article 9 of the WFD establishes the cost recovery principle of water services, which Member States are required to implement by 2010. Many Member States have already put in place water pricing systems.

31. Pricing is indisputably part of the WFD tool-box but other water saving measures are also part of the mix (such as metering for monitoring water use). Pricing also has its limitations to handle discrepancy between demand and supply, due to price elasticity. Water pricing can bring about more negative effects to the agricultural sector than to other economic sectors which can more easily pass on the costs for the use of water resources to the end-consumer.

32. In light of future discussions the following factors are essential to reflect in the implementation of Article 9:

- the specificities of the agricultural sector, in particular its positive externalities, in order to encompass the social, economical and environmental effects of the recovery;
- analysis at catchment basin level of geographical and climatic conditions of the region(s), including seasonal variations;
- water ownership must also be taken into account, as the laying down of costs of any kind for the use of water which has an owner would be problematic.

33. The fact that agricultural drought, being a consequence of meteorological drought, often occurs before hydrological drought, illustrates the vulnerability of agriculture compared to other economic sectors.

34. Drought is a reoccurring, natural disaster with ongoing impact. Regrettably the current system under the EU Solidarity Fund (EUSF), with the condition of declaring damages within ten weeks after first occurrence, do not correspond to natural disasters of extended duration. In relation to eligibility for support from the EUSF COPA-COGECA considers the system needs to be revised in order to take into account the particular difficulty of determining the damages caused by disasters of ongoing effect.[9]

Hierarchy of options – complementarity of policy potions such as well-considered supply-side measures and water saving

35. A long-term view for the management of water resources is needed as a way to prevent the effects of climate variability and to mitigate the strong negative impacts of droughts. COPA-COGECA considers water saving to be of importance (especially losses of up to one third of water in supply networks, and wasteful water use must be addressed), however the options for increased water supplies must not be disregarded.

36. Solutions for the medium and long-term perspective will require foresight planning and investments. The approach must be two-pronged and to completely put investments in supply-side measures on the backburner could potentially lead to delays in planning necessary projects needed in the medium- to long-term perspective. COPA-COGECA therefore recalls the request for the European institutions to examine the following measures:

- to develop larger water resources and their storage;

[9] For more information on drought and other natural disasters in relation to the EUSF, please see the position of COPA-COGECA concerning the Commission's legislative proposal for the EU Solidarity Fund http://www.copa-cogeca.be/pdf/PR_07_32F_1e.pdf

- to organise and manage water resources in accordance with the requirements of the various users and, in particular, farmers.

37. On the impact of further development of biofuels on water availability, COPA-COGECA underlines that as long as agriculture continues to produce a mosaic of cropping for all our needs, be it for food or renewable energy, there should be no wholesale change in water availability. Sealing, which has greater bearing on water availability through reduced recharge to groundwater and increased run-off during rainfall events, is not mentioned in the Commission Communication on water scarcity and drought.