

Conclusions du séminaire sur "Les fruits et légumes dans les économies méditerranéennes", Chania, Crète, 12-14 novembre 1990 : lettre adressée aux ministres de l'agriculture des pays membres du CIHEAM

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Conclusions of the seminar on “Fruits and vegetables in the Mediterranean economies”

Chania, Greece, 12–14 November 1990

(Letter sent to the ministers for agriculture of the members countries of CIHEAM)

As in many other sectors of Mediterranean agriculture, the trends in consumption and production are not always convergent and, moreover, they vary greatly from one part of the region to another. These contrasting trends are also at the origin of distortions and sometimes of conflicts in external markets.

In Western Europe, consumption is increasing slightly in the northern part and is almost stagnant in the southern part which experiences traditionally high levels of intake. But globally, the market is close to saturation. The widening range of products and varieties available throughout the year and the increased competition have brought about an improvement in quality and a better acceptance by consumers.

On the southern and eastern parts of the Mediterranean, consumption per head has greatly expanded during the recent decade as a result of the remarkable increase in production at a pace which is even greater than the increase in population.

This better supply of the market is to a large extent attributable to the growth in international trade. Trade in fruits and vegetables between the North and the South of the European Community has been constantly increasing: 40% of the quantities produced cross at least one national boundary. At the same time, the Community imports from third countries 15% of its requirements in fruits and vegetables. Trade is also increasing among the countries of the Middle East.

As a result of the developments in transport and in production as well as in handling techniques, the fruits and vegetables market has become a global market at world level: the countries of the southern hemisphere occupy a constantly growing share of the market. Moreover, the improvement of the agricultural sector in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe will contribute to an increase in the supply of the international market, notably towards Western Europe.

This international competition has speeded up the modernization and the relocation of production in the Mediterranean basin. Production is becoming concentrated in the most profitable areas, including the great valleys and the productive coastal areas.

In the North African and the Middle East countries, governments have realized large irrigation projects and production is stimulated to meet in the first instance the rapidly growing internal requirements and afterwards to try to export to the industrialized countries.

It remains however that only the countries in the southern and eastern part of the Mediterranean benefit from an expanding internal demand. The other countries, including the EEC countries, face an almost complete saturation of their outlets.

In such a context, the situation in very many cases is being reconsidered, and fears are appearing in those regions where labor costs are high and in those regions where factor productivity is low. This means that this sector is trying to become more productive and efficient, and that an important effort in research and innovation is taking place everywhere to improve production both in terms of volume and of quality.

Faced with a somewhat uncertain situation, the agricultural policy of all countries, including the Common Agricultural Policy of the EEC, are giving to the market a greater role for the purpose of orienting output and are reducing the support measures considered to be responsible for some of the structural surpluses.

This need for a more flexible production, notably in Europe, is due also to the fact that the trend in the distribution sector is towards a greater concentration. This requires a constant adaptation of the processing and marketing methods and structures.

Producers are compelled, individually and collectively, to permanently adapt their production to demand, to organize their profession in order to meet increasing power of the distribution sector, to become better informed of the market trends and to try to regulate the short-term fluctuations so as to avoid, as far as possible, that painful adjustments are dictated by crises.

Public Authorities are therefore invited to help producers to foresee the needed adjustments and to enable them to better manage their production, both quantitatively and qualitatively, in this sector of strategic significance for the regions in the Mediterranean basin.

Finally, the seminar participants have highlighted the need to avoid that international trade take place in conditions which negate to some developing countries, traditional suppliers of the European market, the comparative advantages to which they could claim. Although it is difficult to maintain in any given market, especially in Europe, an assured position, the non-EEC Mediterranean countries should not be handicapped in their efforts to diversify their external outlets by the distorted conditions of competition which they cannot sustain.

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President of CIHEAM