

Agriculture and climate change

The European Liberal Democrat and Reform Party, convening in Barcelona, Catalonia on 19th and 20th November 2009:

Recognises that:

- World agriculture has a significant carbon footprint responsible for up to 7% of CO₂ emissions and is a major emitter of other greenhouse gases, notably methane and nitrous oxide;
- Agricultural production is itself affected by climate change, particularly in areas already marginal due to high temperatures and drought;
- Rising world population, which has almost tripled in fifty years, is putting increasing pressure on agriculture to meet demand and that a continuation of this population trajectory is unsustainable;
- Carbon sinks and natural habitats across the world are under threat and being lost in the quest for increased agricultural production;
- Increasing agricultural production simply by increasing inputs or clearing virgin land is unsustainable due both to adverse effects on climate change and to loss of habitat and biodiversity;
- Policies such as the CAP and agricultural policies of many other countries have often compromised agricultural production in countries too poor to support their agriculture and led to land abandonment;
- Returning abandoned land to agricultural use has significant, albeit insufficient, potential to increase production and should be encouraged;
- Agricultural production in all parts of the world, including Europe, contributes towards achieving global food security; self-sufficiency of individual countries is neither practicable nor desirable and the response to the problem of food security must have an international basis;
- Increased production must be achieved from the currently available area of agricultural and abandoned land and technological advance and transfer must play the key role in increasing yields to meet future demand for agricultural products.

Calls for:

- EU negotiators at WTO trade rounds should support the liberalization of agricultural markets, without neglecting the non-commercial aspects of agriculture.

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- An immediate end to all agricultural export subsidies and progressive disappearance of tariff barriers, taking care to avoid possible negative impacts in areas such as food safety.
- Major food-exporting nations to desist from interrupting exports in attempts to control internal prices;
- Environmental criteria to be incorporated into WTO rules in such a way as to safeguard natural habitats and carbon sinks without encouraging protectionism;
- The development of internationally recognised sustainability criteria for the production of foodstuffs, such as soya, palm oil in former virgin forest, shrimp farming in mangroves, along the lines already developed for either bio-energy or forestry products, effectively halting the loss of further carbon sinks through the clearance of virgin lands;
- Reform of the CAP to minimise its adverse effects on agricultural production outside the EU, but to avoid the risk of both large-scale land abandonment in Europe and commodity-dumping;
- EU representatives to use their influence on other parties (notably the US and NAFTA) to abandon protectionism and make reciprocal reforms to their agricultural policies;
- EU aid budgets to seek to deliver a recovery in agricultural production and reforestation in recipient nations, through a combination of technology transfer, encouraging good farming practice and restoring abandoned land;
- Recognition by European legislators that sustainable and resilient technological advances and improved methods must be harnessed both to increase agricultural yields and reduce the greenhouse gas emissions of agriculture. Attention must be paid to promote greater use of neglected and underutilised food crop and other crop species;
- The negotiators at the Copenhagen Climate Change talks to ensure that any settlement will achieve the objectives of allowing increased global agricultural production within a lower greenhouse gas footprint, and secure at least a 75% reduction in global emissions from deforestation by 2020, and the halving of the carbon intensity of global food production by 2050;
- The EU to join with interested countries to establish a supranational system of reserve food stocks, whilst taking care to avoid undermining the market in agricultural goods;

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- EU initiatives to promote education and raised awareness on climate change and resource depletion, resilience and adaptation, as well as the education of girls and women, and full access to comprehensive family planning and sexual and reproductive health services for all those who wish to access these services.

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