



CONSEIL EUROPEEN DES JEUNES AGRICULTEURS

European Council of Young Farmers - Europäischer Rat der Junglandwirte

Ref: CEJA-S-003-2008-EN

**Encouraging Collective Farmers' Marketing Initiatives
Final Conference, 8 May 2008, Brussels**

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Young Farmers and collective marketing initiatives

Good afternoon to all of you,

I am Pieter van Oost, President of the Flemish young farmers' organisation Groene Kring and vice-President of the European Council of Young Farmers. I am producing flowers together with my father. We are cultivating more than 700 species of azaleas and rhododendrons that we export across Europe or sell directly to the consumers.

Firstly I would like to thank you for inviting CEJA to this conference.

We, at CEJA, have a strong desire to work closer with researchers. We believe that collaboration between the 2 sectors should be intensified to make EU agriculture more attractive and competitive, and this conference is a good opportunity to give you the feedback you need from the farming sector.

To be honest, I did not know the existence of the COFAMI project, while I am operating within several COFAMIs and benefiting from their strengths in my everyday life!

Actually young farmers are among the most relevant persons who can talk about collective initiatives, as most of them experience it through their collective activities with their father, uncle or a third person. They rarely start their business alone ...

Although you talk about different forms of COFAMIs in your research, this form of collaboration can probably also be taken as a sort of COFAMI.

COFAMIs, an answer to new agricultural challenges

Before speaking more precisely about my own experience of COFAMIs, let me start with a more general approach on how COFAMIs enter into our model of agriculture and can help farmers to face the new challenges of agriculture.

In times of globalisation where international competition becomes fiercer than ever before, the pressure on all economic actors is constantly growing. Easier means for transportation and communication, reduced trade barriers and the spread of technology have combined to sharpen international competition. Farmers are among the first to face this competition and the great challenges of these days are putting more and more pressure on them. Climate change is one of these challenges, as well as ever higher expectations from society. While food demand is currently on top of the agenda at international level, European citizens additionally ask for ever safer and healthier food of high quality, as well as an attractive countryside.

Farmers are asked to produce more quality food in a sustainable way and to provide environmental and social services in rural areas.

It even becomes more and more difficult for farmers to justify the fair price of their products and therefore the right value of their work.

It sounds quite tricky, but young farmers are ready to tackle these challenges, and COFAMIS could be part of the solution, if recognized as such and supported!

COFAMIs, a tool for our model of agriculture

CEJA represents more than 1 million young farmers across Europe that all agreed on a sustainable model of agriculture as an answer to current and future issues. Competitiveness, multifunctionality and innovation are the cornerstones of our model, all based on sustainability and usually directly linked to the territory where our products are coming from. I will give you a few ideas on our approach that supports and can be supported by COFAMIs.

Transparency

At CEJA, we regularly ask for more transparency in the market to better inform the consumers. One possibility of such information could be the mandatory indication of

origin on the products. The diversity and quality of European products are the assets of European agriculture and have to be promoted. A real marketing and promotion policy for European agricultural products has to be put into place, at European level but also at regional and local levels. Linking the product to the territory it was produced on is also a way of recognizing the right added value of the product deriving from European farming in terms of food safety, quality, protection of the environment, traditions and culture.

In that context, COFAMIs can play an important role in developing a marketing strategy on a specific product or group of products, linked to a specific territory. COFAMIs will reinforce the communication visibility of the strategy, but also its economic efficiency, by financing a common advertisement for example.

Cooperation

If we wish to keep this European farming structure which is linked to its territory and keeps rural areas alive, we need to assure collaboration between farmers in order to create a more efficient way of cooperation, as well as greater contractual power that increases the share of the added value for the farmer.

Cooperatives and other forms of COFAMIs between the actors of the food chain are a good way of improving their situation by allowing them to control the processing and sale of their products. Transnational entities could provide one way of adapting to market globalisation and producer organisations could assist small farms to gain a better position on the market.

Even more than that: producer organisations, if they are well managed, can be real partners for the food industry.

Innovation

To remain competitive, young farmers also believe in the necessity to continuously invest in innovation. A stronger link to the research sector and a harmonisation of the acceptance and implementation of the results could facilitate a better access to innovation. This would then help the farmer to faster adapt to the market as well as to new challenges connected to environmental protection and climate change.

The organisation of farmers in COFAMIs can serve as a good tool to work closer and more efficiently with research.

I will give you my personal experience on that particular point: a small part of my professional activity is to create new species of Azaleas. To facilitate the continuous research that is needed for this innovative approach, my father and I belong to a cooperation group gathering 21 members across Belgium who finance a researcher all over the year.

Agro-energies

At CEJA, we also promote production and consumption of agro-energies at local level, to support economic growth, social and territorial cohesion. Production of agro-energies also helps reducing Europe's energy dependency as well as its greenhouse gas emissions, thanks to less imports and therefore less long-distance transports.. CEJA's vision aims at an integrated approach of all available sources of renewable energy at farm level, such as water, wind or solar energy, or the use of micro-generators using local biomass etc ...

To facilitate such optimized use of different sources, small COFAMIs can be implemented. I know for example farmers recuperating energy from a neighbour industry to heat their greenhouses.

Farmers can also gather in COFAMIs for an optimal use of biogas production: biogas enables, for example, electricity production for an engine, which is then used for heating greenhouses while CO2 emissions can be disseminated for some specific inside production such as salads, for example.

Lifelong Learning

Access to innovation and best practices goes also through an easier accessibility of training and counselling for farmers, all along their life. To prepare themselves to the new challenges and be updated on technology innovations, farmers should work closer together to share their experiences and exchange with advisory services.

At CEJA, we try to achieve this objective at European level, but training-oriented COFAMIs can also be a useful tool at national, regional or local level and should be supported by the corresponding authorities.

COFAMIs, what I can bring from my own experience

Because COFAMIs are part of the solution to face new challenges and because COFAMIs are a possible instrument for the implementation of our model of agriculture, I would like to see more collective initiatives around me!

I have the feeling that farmers are afraid to work together, while it is beyond any doubt a wonderful way to go forward on a global point of view, but also on an individual point of view!

Another concrete example: in my region we practice “co-working”, which means that we are a group of farmers that are financing and sharing replacement staff that helps farmers in difficulties, on holidays etc ... this is a way of expressing solidarity between us!

I also see some good emerging initiatives that would deserve more attention:

- For example the idea to create small intermediate enterprises gathering different complementary producers to facilitate a more transparent and direct selling should be encouraged! It would answer to quality and safety demands and ensure transparent prices for consumers, as well as avoid long distance transports.

- Furthermore, we regularly buy, together with other farmers, products such as fertilizers, materials ... etc. This is a kind of non-official collaboration that could be formalized through the creation of a COFAMI, which will help us all to become better organized and work more efficiently!

- In terms of logistics, some farmers in Holland, for example, are organizing themselves in geographic zones according to their production. The idea is to avoid transports and to maximise efficiency for providers, retailers ... etc

These are few examples that could be more supported and encouraged!

Let me conclude now with a few personal remarks, about what should, in my mind, be the frame of a good COFAMI.

I gathered 12 principles that should ensure the success and the durability of a COFAMI:

1. a first essential principle of equality
2. a principle of progressive collaboration: the common work has to go step by step!
3. a win-win principle for all collaborators

4. a principle of complementing each other
5. a principle of a common vision and common objectives
6. a principle of a clear legal agreement between the collaborators (I know a lot of informal collaboration that fails)
7. a principle of open and clear communication between partners
8. very important: a principle of confidence between them
9. a principle of availability
10. a principle of flexibility
11. a principle of open-mindedness on what is happening elsewhere (not only look at your own business)
12. a principle of reliable business

These principles of common work are not very hard to implement and should be supported and supervised by legal authorities to give more weight and maybe more insurance to farmers that hesitate to take part in the adventure!

I think we should, in the first place, encourage farmers to work together, communicate on the different possibilities they have and show them the benefits they could profit from.

Thank you for your attention.