



EEB Comments to the European Parliaments Rural Development Conference Statement – July 14, 2005

The EEB is very pleased with the initiative for this conference, especially as regards the timing of the conference, two days before EU heads of state are hoping to come to an agreement on spending levels for rural development for the period 2007 -2013.

We welcome the draft statement of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development on the EU's Rural Development Strategy which strikes the right balance between the different components of sustainable development: social, economic and environmental. It rightly states that cohesion, competitiveness and sustainability are inseparable goals for the future of rural development policy in Europe.

We would like to underline that achieving the objective of sustainability means that Rural Development Policy will contribute to achieving EU environmental policy priorities such as halting the loss of biodiversity by 2010 and implementing Natura 2000 and the Water Framework Directive. It should also be pointed out that meeting these crucial targets will have far ranging benefits, also for competitiveness and cohesion, leading to a better and healthier living environment as well stimulating innovative sources of income in rural areas alongside agriculture.

Public participation in the process of drafting national rural development plans is crucial and should include all relevant stakeholders and partners. The positive experiences made with the LEADER approach should for example be mainstreamed into Rural Development Policy. For this reason we especially welcome the call for a new social contract between the EU, National governments and civil society.

In order for Rural Development Policy to meet its potential it is absolutely crucial that a clear message is sent out to the general Council that funding levels for the EAFRD ought to be increased, not decreased.

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