

Perspectives of rural areas lagging behind in view of the new rural development directives

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The establishment of the agricultural and rural development policy for the period of 2014-2020 is to be finalised soon, at least a quite clear picture can already be obtained on the new or old-new directives and objectives of rural development. Amongst the priorities are:

- promoting competitiveness in agricultural production,
- food security and safety, strengthening safe and reliable food supply,
- promoting resource efficiency and supporting the shift towards a low-carbon and climate-resilient economy,
- enhanced protection of biodiversity,
- fostering knowledge transfer and innovation,
- increasing rural local employment, decreasing poverty.

This extremely inter-related set of objectives gives room for the competitive and market oriented food producing agricultural sector, nevertheless it also follows the trend to assign bigger role for the multifunctional agriculture that provides public goods, including agricultural activity in mountainous areas. Furthermore, the new rural development policy recognizes the great role of local economies and local supply systems in revitalizing rural areas, for which aim it gives further, strengthened support for the young farmers, the small producers and the agricultural cooperatives.

In the last years, the Commissioner for agriculture and rural development initiated on many forums discussion on the problems of the rural areas lagging behind and the examination of the role of semi-subsistence farming, local economy and the short supply chains. As a result of these conferences and researches, increased support of these areas can be detected in the draft regulations. It can be stated, that the climate change and the financial crisis together pushed the decision makers towards a healthier and more sustainable way of thinking and policy making, and that the new agricultural and rural development policy is going to offer significantly more possibilities for the areas lagging behind to redefine and strengthen their economy. Nonetheless, all the responsibility cannot be put on the shoulders of the EU-level decision makers and economic development cannot be expected only from external sources. In the EU there are many opportunities to receive grants for a given purpose, however, well-prepared and open society and entrepreneurial environment is needed, which has the necessary knowledge and skills to understand the subsidy system and the continuous changes of the economic environment.