

The Political Geography of EU Agricultural Policy Adjustment

**Adjusting to Domestic and International
Agricultural Policy Reform in Industrial
Countries Philadelphia June 2004**

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Aims of Talk

- ☛ Provide an historical context to policy reform and agricultural adjustment within the EU, and especially the UK.
- ☛ Examine scope for national, regional and local difference, based on the different cultural, political and geographical circumstances of member states.
- ☛ Examine how the underlying rationale for a common policy, built around the notion of family farming, is being supplanted by a new public justification for intervention based on rural development and agri-environmental distinctiveness.

Why UK was slow to protect agriculture in late 19th Century

- ☛ Britain's lead in industrial production
- ☛ Economic theorists
- ☛ Political legacy of the anti Corn Laws agitation
- ☛ British navy
- ☛ Food production of British colonies
- ☛ Political weakness of landowners
- ☛ No coherent and united agricultural pressure group
- ☛ No peasantry in most parts of Britain.

The CAP

- ☛ **The Common Agricultural Policy became the major vehicle for the construction of European communal space and the codification of European common meanings about agriculture and rural society that could be agreed to by people representing different member states. the Common Agricultural Policy changed the image of the rural from a vague, indeterminate, national context-specific, improvised socio-linguistic practice to an objectified, publicly visible, formalized and generalized Community-wide representation of the rural that has the political advantage of enabling each member state to interpret it in terms of its national interest. (Gray 2000: 33).**

Article 39 Treaty of Rome

- ☛ **to increase agricultural productivity**
- ☛ **to ensure a fair standard of living for the agricultural community, in particular by increasing the individual earnings of persons engaged in agriculture;**
- ☛ **to stabilise markets;**
- ☛ **to assure the availability of supplies;**
- ☛ **to ensure that supplies reach consumers at reasonable prices.**

Key 'ideological' elements in CAP

☛ **Family Farming**

☛ **Food Security**

and later:

☛ **Multifunctionality and the European Model**

Re-spatialisation of agriculture

- ☛ **areas close to cities subject to “the pressures of modern life”,**
- ☛ **“outlying regions”,**
- ☛ **“very marginal areas”.**

☛ ... it is also a place for environmental preservation in those areas where the price support mechanisms of the Common Agricultural Policy have led farmers to adopt intensive but ecologically damaging methods of agricultural production ... This representation of rural areas for leisure and environmental preservation continued the moral-reproductive function of the earlier rural fundamentalist image that the Common Agricultural Policy originally envisioned for farming in rural society (Gray 2000: 43).

Marginal areas: 'rural in the extreme'

- ☛ **The word 'extreme' is important ... because it is a narrative form of distanciation as well as authenticity. Its use makes poorer agricultural regions ... into a kind of distanced and marginal landscape - a museum-like place portraying the original image of rural space where family farming and a valued form of society continue to exist. (Gray 2000: 43)**

Changing Language

☛ **‘Food security’ and ‘market management’**

replaced by:

☛ **‘public good’ and ‘competitiveness’**

Aspects of Re-spatialisation

- ☛ **Agricultural ecologies**
- ☛ **Embedding economies in response to globalisation**
- ☛ **The turn to local/regional governance**

The New Policy Adjustment: The English Strategy for Sustainable Farming & Food

- ☛ **The strategy is built around three models for the future of farming and the rural economy. These are not necessarily mutually contradictory or incompatible, but they are in tension.**
- ☛ **A fundamental issue is that the Strategy neither explicitly recognises these tensions nor provides a strong vision of the balance to be struck between between them.**

Three Models of UK Farmers

- 1) Farmers as producers of food commodities in a global free market.**
- 2) Farmers as multifunctional – producers of public goods for which there is not an existing market.**
- 3) Farmers as land-based entrepreneurs within a diversified rural economy.**

The Strategy's specific policies flow from these 3 models

- ☞ **WTO compliance and CAP reform – principles of decoupling and removal of trade barriers.**
- ☞ **Rewarding farmers for the provision of public goods – agri-environment schemes, etc.**
- ☞ **Facilitating diverse rural economic development – easing of planning restrictions, encouragement of regional/local food initiatives, etc.**

Problems of Adjustment

- ☞ **Weakness of UK's competitive position.**
- ☞ **Inadequacy of proposed returns to farmers for public goods.**
- ☞ **Weak notion of multifunctionality.**
- ☞ **Implied criticism of farmers in the rural economy, which fails to recognise how much is already in place.**
- ☞ **Failure to address the tensions between global and local market possibilities.**

Conclusions

- ☛ **Cook and Harrison (2003): “capitalism is not a monolithic cultural/economic system but is, rather, multiple, fragmented, dynamic, locally diverse/hybrid and peppered with creative possibilities for achieving the (theoretically) unexpected.” (pp.313).**
- ☛ **In the context of unfolding European policy adjustment the message from my paper is to expect the unexpected.**