Assoċjazzjoni Tal-Bdiewa

Maltese Farmers' View on the CAP

26th June 2012 - Sofia - Joseph German

Farmer Learning Centre

BRIEF ON ASSOCJAZZJONI TAL-BDIEWA

(ATB)

The *Assocjazzjoni tal-Bdiewa* (ATB) is Malta's National Farmer's Union duly registered and recognized under Maltese Law. Set up in June 1921, the first official 'count' by the authorities took place in 1956 and 890 farmers were duly registered as members. Nowadays we represent about 1,250 farmers. Unfortunately, we are losing farmers every year because it is difficult to compete in such a small micro-market which is open to unfair competiton.

Since Malta became a member of the European Union in May 2004, Malta's farmers have had to face up to countless challenges in their quest to establish a viable and sustainable agriculture sector. This is mainly due to the lack of preparedness for EU Membership both in terms of education, knowledge, and understanding of the implications, as well as the lack of investment/infrastructure/capacity building.

ATB's vision goes beyond assisting farmers to become compliant with EU regulations, which is important nonetheless; we would like to give every Maltese farmer the opportunity to attain a professional status. This means that every farmer must have the opportunity to address the digital divide, understand obligations and become compliant, and embark on a quality drive that will also include technical assistance and sourcing finance for the required investment (including EU Funding).

One of our recent projects was the setting up of a ***'Farmer Learning Centre'***, the first of its kind in the Mediterranean. ATB will strive to achieve excellence certification and we are also keen to promote our initiative abroad in the form of a *'franchise'*.

FARMER
LEARNING CENTRE

Assoċjazzjoni
Tal-Bdiewa

Armed with the latest technologies, our farmers will bridge the divide that is restricting their rate of progress, they will learn how to increase quality all-round, and become competitive even though they manage very small farms, and this will lead to the ability to face and fend off any challenges that they are bound to encounter from time to time.

Eventually, we hope, they will search beyond our shores for niche markets and other countless opportunities, while further satisfying our local consumer's expectations and ensuring that we provide our visitors with exceptional agro-alimentary and ene-gastronomic mouth-watering quality products in synergy with the leisure industry to enhance the local experiences offered to tourists.

FARMER LEARNING CENTRE

Assoċjazzjoni Tal-Bdiewa

Assoċjazzjoni Tal-Bdiewa

LIMITATIONS - DISADVANTAGES

FARMER LEARNING CENTRE

LIMITATIONS - DISADVANTAGES

- SMALL ISLAND – LOCATION AND AREA
- FRAGMANTATION OF LAND
- SMALL HOLDINGS – AVERAGE OF .05 HA
- OLD AGED FARMING POPULATION
- CLIMATE CONDITIONS
- PRODUCT EFFECIENCY

FARMER LEARNING CENTRE

Assoċjazzjoni Tal-Bdiewa

LOCATION AND AREA

The Maltese Islands have a total area of 316 square kilometres and are located in the centre of the Mediterranean Sea, approximately 100 km south of Sicily. The archipelago consists of three main islands, namely

Malta, the largest, (about 245 km^2, population of about 350,000),

Gozo, the second largest, (67 km^2, population of about 30,000), and

Comino, which was only inhabited by three people in 2003.

FARMER LEARNING CENTRE

Assoċjazzjoni Tal-Bdiewa

Land fragmentation

Land fragmentation is caused mainly by the laws of inheritance under which the land is constantly sub-divided until it is no longer feasible to work it profitably. For the most part, the fields are composed of terraces. The shape and size of the individual plots often makes cultivation difficult and the use of heavier agricultural machinery more complicated.

Growers are thus reluctant to make long-term investments due to the risk of not continuing to hold tenure on their land.

Farmer Learning Centre

Assoċjazzjoni Tal-Bdiewa

Agriculture's share in the GDP for Malta has been declining in view of the relatively high rates of total GDP growth since the 1980s, and presently stands at approx. 2.5%. The development of agriculture in Malta is constrained by the natural and geographical characteristics of the islands. The major constraints facing agricultural activity are the opportunity cost of land (due to the small size of the Island), the scarcity of water resources and the high labour costs.

SMALL HOLDINGS – AGEING POPULATION

87% of the agricultural parcels are less than one ha in area, and 99.7% of the parcels are less than 5 ha.
The total number of registered tenants of agricultural land is approx. 11,000; of these,

Approx. - 950were full-time farmers,
Approx. - 10,500 were part-timers

Approx 43 % of land tenants are over 60 years old, and approx. 47 % are aged between 40 and 60.

Compared to the situation in 1990, when 34 % of the tenants were below the age of 40, the present statistics show that only 10 % of tenants are below the age of 40.

FARMER LEARNING CENTRE

Assoċjazzjoni Tal-Bdiewa

Potatoes are by far the major agricultural crop (excluding fodder crops) and this reflects on the Export statistics. Although efforts are being made to diversify this trend it is increasingly difficult to find new niche markets .

All these limitations effect our efficiency and competition compared to other EU States.

Assoċjazzjoni Tal-Bdiewa

CLIMATE

Farmer Learning Centre

The climate of the Maltese archipelago is typically Mediterranean, with dry, hot summers and mild rainy winters.

Rainfall is the only natural source of water. The seasonal distribution of rainfall defines a wet period (October to March with 70-85% of the total annual precipitation) and a dry period (April to September). The average annual precipitation is circa 530 mm.

Farmer Learning Centre

Assoċjazzjoni Tal-Bdiewa

PRODUCT EFFECIENCY

Our view is that in order to be more sustainable and competitive a vigorous educational campaign should be implemented to educate and inform consumers of the products that are found on the shelves.

This has also to be complimented with :

- A quality product system to ensure that the products are of the highest levels.
- Grading of products that will ensure a more attractive selling point.

FARMER LEARNING CENTRE

CONCLUSION

As I have explained earlier the disadvantages and liabilities such as the size of the country and the climate conditions are constant challenges that the Maltese Farmer is enduring on a day to day basis and in view of all this, it is noted that Malta still fully observes its obligations as regards to Cross-compliance and regulations deriving from the EU.

A more efficient Mechanism is to be provided to help farmers to obtain financial aid for modernisation as this will definitely help farmers and the agricultural community to an increase in production, efficiency and profitability i.e.

- A decrease in labour and costs.
- Better quality of produce.
- Better quality of life for producers and farmers.
- An improvement in quality and quantity of crop production.

Farmer Learning Centre

Assoċjazzjoni Tal-Bdiewa

Maltese farmers and their holdings are unique not only in Europe but also around the globe. While adequate support was negotiated for the cattle breeders when the EU agreed to take on-board their exceptional circumstances by accepting the principle of land-less farmers (where cattle breeders are compensated through Pillar 1 Direct Payments as though they had land attached to their farms (which in fact they do not have), we expect our negotiators to better understand the unique situation that Maltese farmers face up to and hopefully they will persuade the EU Commission, EU Parliament, and our EU partner Countries that Malta requires a special status on the lines of the exceptional circumstances attributed to the Mountainous Areas and the Remote Regions.

If the EU would like to give a hand to stop the exodus of farmers and to ensure that Malta & Gozo will keep an appreciable amount of active farmers then there is only one way to do this.

Let us acknowledge the exceptional circumstances, let us agree that the new CAP does not offer any possible opportunity to address these exceptional circumstances, and let us find the necessary solution in time to find its deserved place in the new CAP.

THANK YOU
for your attention