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**L'AGRICULTURE ET LES EXIGENCES DU  
DÉVELOPPEMENT DURABLE – AGRICULTURE AND THE  
REQUIREMENTS OF A SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT – DIE  
LANDWIRTSCHAFT UND DIE ANFORDERUNGEN AN DEREN  
NACHHALTIGE ENTWICKLUNG**

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## Summary

Finland has a national strategy for sustainable development: "Towards sustainable choices. Nationally and globally sustainable Finland". The Strategy was adopted in June 2006 by the Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development. According to the new Finnish Government Programme the Strategi will be revised during the next four years period in order to define the goals and principles as well as the indicators related to sustainable development.

The characteristic feature of the Finnish national sustainable development policy is a wide-reaching participation of various societal actors both in the definition of the contents and implementation of the measures. The approach is already referred to as the "Finnish model", in which broad-based, multi-stakeholder participation is combined with high-level political leadership.

Since the late 1980's, Finland has strived to enhance the role of sustainable development in mainstream politics. The Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development has been working continuously since 1993. Led by the Prime Ministers for 14 years until recently, it has brought into the limelight of national debate several important themes of sustainable development.

In agriculture, the agri-environment scheme has considerably increased the environmental awareness of farmers. According to the new Finnish Government Programme, the scheme will be revised to promote the protection of waters and biodiversity even better than so far.

Beside environmental considerations, the social, cultural and economical aspects of sustainable development have increasingly gained foothold in Finland. One of the ultimate aims is to consider impacts of sustainable development in an integrative way and, consequently, enable the materialization of the potential win-win-win opportunities in building up a sustainable society.

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# **1 Legislation and strategies concerning sustainable development in Finland**

## **1.1 Sustainable development and the Finnish legislation**

The concept of sustainable development is mentioned as an objective in several Finnish acts, mostly in the legislation prepared by the Ministry of the Environment and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry.

The Finnish Ministry of the Environment produces legislation on environmental protection, nature conservation, land use and building, and housing. Since Finland joined the EU in 1995, national legislation has been widely harmonized with community legislation, particularly where environmental protection and nature conservation are concerned.

Environmental Protection Act (86/2000) in Finland is one of the most important acts concerning the principle of sustainable development. The objective of this Act is:

- to prevent the pollution of the environment and to repair and reduce the damage caused by pollution
- to safeguard a healthy, pleasant and ecologically diverse and sustainable environment
- to prevent the generation and the harmful effects of waste
- to improve and integrate
- to improve citizens' opportunities to influence decisions concerning the environment
- to promote sustainable use of natural resources and
- to combat climate change and otherwise support sustainable development

Land use, spatial planning and construction are controlled by the Land Use and Building Act. Promoting the sustainable development is also one of the main objectives of the Land Use and Building Act.

Sustainable development is also mentioned as an objective in the legislation produced by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. This Ministry steers the policy on sustainable use of natural resources in Finland.

The most important regulation concerning sustainable development in agriculture is the act on the agri-environmental payments. Agri-environmental support is paid to farmers to encourage them to take measures that promote biodiversity and reduce the harmful impacts of nutrients in runoff from farmland on inland waters and the sea.

Forest legislation is the most powerful means of forest policy for ensuring sustainable forestry. The Forest Act lays down provisions on the restrictions and preconditions for the use of commercial forests. The Act on the Financing of Sustainable Forestry promotes forest improvement and environmental management in private forests and the use of wood for energy.

In Finland, the legislative level of regulation, in which the sustainable development is mentioned as an objective, is usually an act. The Constitution of Finland includes also general regulation concerning responsibility for the environment. According to the section 20 in the Constitution of Finland the public authorities shall endeavour to guarantee for everyone the right to a healthy environment and for everyone the possibility to influence the decisions that concern their own living environment.

## **1.2 Finland's national strategy for sustainable development**

Finland's national strategy for sustainable development "Towards sustainable choices. Nationally and globally sustainable Finland" was adopted in June 2006 by the Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development.

The vision of the National strategy is to assure well-being within the limits of the carrying capacity of nature nationally and globally. The objective is to create sustainable well-being in a safe and pluralistic society that promotes participation, and in which all citizens take responsibility for the environment. The starting point is that the key guidelines of the Strategy form foundation for drafting Government policy programmes. The timeline for the targets is beyond current generations, extending until about 2030.

Theme-based objectives of the National Strategy are:

1. The use and production of natural resources
2. Communities and regional structure
3. Well-being of citizens
4. Finland as a global actor and bearer of responsibility

The National Strategy for the Sustainable Development obliges central government agencies to prepare sustainable development programmes for their activities. Also municipalities are encouraged to prepare sustainable development programmes covering their activities and to include Government guidelines for sustainable development in municipal strategies.

The Strategy is valid until further notice. The objective is to guarantee the continuity of sustainable development policy. According to the new Finnish Government Programme the national strategy for sustainable development will be revised during the next four years period in order to define the goals and principles as well as the indicators related to sustainable development.

## **2 Principles and aims of sustainable development in strategies of Finnish ministries**

All of the strategies of the Finnish ministries mention the concept of sustainable development or at least refer to the term indirectly. The sustainable development is specially highlighted in the strategies of the Ministry of the Environment and Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry.

The main goals set out in the strategy of the Ministry of the Environment are to increase environmental responsibility throughout Finnish society, to ensure that our environment is safe, and to improve the state of the Baltic Sea. Reaching these goals will involve:

- promoting the use of economic policy instruments
- slowing the impoverishment of biodiversity
- curbing eutrophication in the Baltic Sea, and building up adequate capacity to prevent oil pollution
- reducing the amounts of waste generated in relation to economic growth

- reducing the harmful effects of hazardous and dangerous substances
- preparing to influence the setting of targets for the next phase of the implementation of the UN Climate Protocol, and then carrying out the necessary measures

The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry steers Finnish policies relating to the sustainable use of natural resources in line with Finnish Government and EU policies. This Ministry's administrative work covers agriculture and horticulture, rural development, forestry, veterinary services, controls over foodstuffs of animal origin, fisheries, game management and reindeer husbandry, the use of water resources, and land surveying.

Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry has highlighted the sustainable development at strategy level:

- Mission statement: the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry steers the policy on the sustainable use of natural resources as part of the Finnish Government and the EU institutions and decision-making
- Vision: Finland is a society which utilises renewable natural resources in a sustainable, diversified and efficient way where people and nature are doing well

The Natural Resources Strategy of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry specifies how Finland's renewable natural resources must be used and managed in sustainable ways. The strategy also defines specific objectives related to the sustainable use of natural resources.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry shares responsibility for the state of biodiversity in Finland, as part of the Finnish Government. The ministry has overall responsibility for the sustainable use, management and conservation of biodiversity in connection with agriculture, forestry, game stocks, reindeer husbandry, fisheries and natural resource use in the context of rural development.

Finland's National Strategy and Action Plan for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biodiversity in Finland for the period 2006-2016 aim to meet Finland's internationally agreed obligations and objectives. The responsibility for implementing the measures in the action plan measures

is shared among the public authorities. Significantly slowing the ongoing decline in biodiversity is a vital global goal. The EU and Finland have defined an even more challenging target: to completely halt the loss of biodiversity.

### **3 Realization of principles and aims of sustainable development**

#### **3.1 Commission on Sustainable Development**

The Government established the Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development (FNCSD) in 1993 to promote sustainable development in Finland, and the Commission has operated continuously since that time. Led by the Prime Ministers for 14 years until recently, it has brought into the limelight of national debate several important themes of sustainable development.

Finland's sustainable development policy is based on institutional learning and broad participation wherein various societal actors take part in the definition and implementation of sustainable development. The composition of the FNCSD is broad. In order to give political impetus to the work, the Government has taken the lead in the Commission. It was chaired by the Prime Ministers - four altogether - for 14 years, until April 2007. After the parliamentary election in 2007 the Minister of Labour took the lead together with the vice-chair, Minister of the Environment. Four other Ministers from the Government as well as representatives from all spheres of the Finnish society are members of the Commission. The Parliament, public administration including local authorities, business and industry, labour unions, NGOs, various interest groups, the media and churches are all invited to give their input in guiding Finland into a sustainable path.

The FNCSD acts as a forum where different stakeholders can present their ideas, goals and programmes and engage in a broad debate about sustainability. The Commission has introduced and debated many highly topical themes, acted as an interpreter between national and international sustainable development trends and supported the work carried out by various actors. The Commission has played an active role in the preparation, endorsement and approval of different strategies, programmes and processes for sustainable development, including the National Strategy for Sustainable Development of June 2006. A



discussion forum open for different groups of actors has also been seen as a valuable factor building up national integrity.

The work of the FNCSD is outlined and prepared by an inter-ministerial secretariat, which operates as a network and convenes 8-10 times a year. The secretariat comprises about 20 members from different ministries, each taking the lead in preparations for themes within their area of expertise. The FNCSD's Secretary come from the Ministry of the Environment, which also looks after practical arrangements and provides funding for the Commission's work.

The National Strategy and the Finnish Government Programme obliges various actors to implement different measures in order to ensure application of the sustainable development. The National Strategy for Sustainable Development is assessed every two years and this examination is linked to the assessment process for the EU Strategy for Sustainable Development. The FNCSD reports to the Government on the results of the assessment. The main responsibility for the guidelines and the implementation of sustainable development lies with the Finnish Government, which will direct the work by means of government and policy programmes.

The objective is that the sustainable development guidelines presented in the Strategy should be taken into account in the programmes and strategies of various administrative sectors and in those of other actors involved in the Strategy. Central governmental agencies are obliged to prepare sustainable development programmes for their activities. The National Commission on Sustainable Development has prepared an implementation guide that has been delivered to state and regional organisations.

### **3.2 Assessment**

The follow-up and assesment system for sustainable development in Finland consists of following elements.

Sustainable development indicators are being used to monitor and assess the implementation of the sustainable development goals in Finland. This set of indicators is intended for the illustration of the various areas of sustainable development in the most deverse and comprehensive manner

possible. The latest indicator set was published in the summer of 2006, together with the new national strategy for sustainable development and it includes 34 key indicators. National indicator work is carried out through co-operation between several ministries and research institutes. Since 1997, a special working group, called the indicator net, whose members come from all ministries and a few from research institutes, has assumed responsibility of this work.

When assessing the usability of the indicators, the core criteria are as follows:

- validity; the indicators measure what is set as a target
- governance: it is known what should be done on the basis of the trends indicators show
- relevance; important data or statistics that must be followed
- timeliness; the data is available when needed

With regard to validity it has been noted that environmental indicators are generally more effective than social ones. The indicators are considered important, but according to the study made by the Ministry of the Environment, they are not utilised in decisionmaking in practise due to the poor usability of the indicators.

Progress in the implementation of the National Strategy for Sustainable Development is assessed every two years and reported to the National SD commission.

The aim of a special ENVIMAT project is to define the life cycle environmental impacts of the material flows used for production and consumption in the Finnish economy, and allocated to various activity sectors and product groups. The aim has been to create a realistic overview of the impacts caused by domestic consumption and investments and the share of production exported for use by others.

In strategy work related to sustainable development, significant efforts have been made to develop follow-up and assessment systems.

The principle of sustainable development has no binding force. It is the Government and the Ministries who carry the responsibility for the application of the sustainable development in their policies in practise. It would be vitally important that all the information that the follow-up

system for sustainable development provides, would be well linked to the political decision-making. The goal of indicator work should be to produce indicators that facilitate operative decision-making rather than producing indicators describing the state of sustainable development at macro level, by target area. The usability of such indicators in organisational decision-making is rather low.

#### **4 Measures to be taken to lead us to sustainable agriculture**

The agri-environment scheme of the European Union is essential in the efforts to reduce nutrient loading from agricultural sources. The impacts on waters appear after a certain lag as the nutrients stored earlier during the period of more abundant fertilisation are removed from the soil quite slowly. The agri-environment scheme has considerably increased the environmental awareness of farmers. According to the new Finnish Government Programme, the agri-environment scheme will be revised to promote the protection of waters and biodiversity better than so far. This means that agri-environment measures will be specifically targeted to the most sensitive areas both regionally and in terms of individual farms and parcels.

One of the most sustainable types of agriculture is organic production, where highly advanced but still natural plant protection methods are used instead of chemical pesticides. One way to prevent weeds and pests is crop rotation. Weeds are removed mechanically and biological prevention is used against pests. Among the alternative methods of food production, organic production comes the closest to the principles of sustainable development.

As to the wider context of sustainable development a special attention has to be paid to its social dimension. Social welfare of farmers is one of the basic conditions for socially sustainable development of rural areas. For example farmers' holiday and substitute scheme and change-of-generation scheme contribute to the welfare of farmers and promote the opportunities for development of sustainable agriculture.

## **5 Participation of the public in the adoption of resolutions in the process of sustainable development**

According to the National Strategy of Finland sustainable development requires that citizens have equal opportunities to participate, bear responsibility and benefit from the increased choices resulting from development. Knowledge and use of various means of participation and influence is essential to the development of democracy, learning about visioning and building a sustainable future.

In the Finnish legislation, the participation of the public has been guaranteed especially in environmental issues. According to Section 20 of the Finnish Constitution: "Nature and its biodiversity, the environment and the national heritage are the responsibility of everyone. The public authorities shall endeavour to guarantee for everyone the right to a healthy environment and for everyone the possibility to influence the decisions that concern their own living environment."

According to Section 12 of the Finnish Constitution "Documents and recordings in the possession of the authorities are public, unless their publication has for compelling reasons been specifically restricted by an Act. Everyone has the right of access to public documents and recordings."

The goals of increasing citizens' opportunities to participate and influence decisions, and ensuring that information is widely available to citizens, are among the key objectives behind the legislation drafted by the Ministry of the Environment. An official decision made by the Ministry in 2005 was made to guarantee the availability, quality and active dissemination of information on the environment. This decision also served to implement EU Directive 2003/4/EC on public access to environmental information.

The opportunities to participate and influence decisions concerning the environment have been guaranteed in the Environmental Protection Act. A key provision of the Environmental Protection Act is the public's right to influence the decision-making by stating an opinion on an environmental permit application. Other stakeholders also have certain rights under the Act. In addition to the parties involved (permit applicants and persons who are affected by an activity), associations and

foundations that promote the protection of the environment, health and nature or that work to improve the living environment and who may be affected by an activity have the right to appeal a permit decision.

## **6 Integration of sustainability in the economic process**

Today the environmental regulation in Finland is mainly constructed upon the EU law. According to Article 190(2) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, the union policy on the environment is based on the precautionary principle and on the principles that preventive action should be taken, that environmental damage should as a priority be rectified at source and that the polluter should pay.

In the Finnish legislation provisions on the polluter pays principle are laid down in section 4 of the Environmental Protection Act. Because the liability for environmental damage does not necessarily imply illegal action, the assessment who in the end is the liable party is left to the discretion of the legislator. In the case of contamination there are, in principle, three alternatives. It may be ruled that the liable party is the operator whose action was the cause of the possible contamination. Second, the manufacturer or marketer of the product or goods which caused the contamination either directly or through the activity of another entrepreneur may be considered liable. Third, the liability may be imposed upon a contractor or person who neglected a certain task who operates on a temporary basis if the damage is considered a consequence of his or her action.

## **7 Main instruments available to protect and to improve the quality of the environment**

Environmental policy instruments in Finland can be classified into legislative controls, economic instruments and informative measures.

Legislative controls mean for example permits and prohibitions. Harmful environmental impacts are largely controlled through the compulsory environmental permits that cover all kinds of potentially harmful activities. Other environmental legislation has been enacted to prohibit the use of certain harmful substances, to set limits on emissions, to enforce certain technical standards, to make producers responsible for their products as waste, to limit certain activities in special areas such as

nature reserves or car-free areas in cities, and to control land use planning.

Whereas legislative policies mainly consist of enforcements and restrictions, economic instruments are designed to provide more positive financial incentives to promote more favourable forms of production and consumption. Economic instruments include selective taxes and fees, as well as various kinds of subsidies, grants and tax exemptions, for both companies and individual citizens. The key feature of all these measures is that the authorities are involved at one end of the financial transaction. Through another type of economic instrument, the authorities can also set favourable frameworks for financial transactions within the private sector. Such instruments include the deposits paid on returnable drinks containers, and emissions trading schemes.

It is often difficult or even impossible to trace the original causes of environmental problems. It is therefore vital that the authorities also use softer policy instruments to improve our understanding and awareness of these issues. Extensive research and monitoring work must be supported and publicised, and public awareness of environmental issues should be increased through education and special training. Other informative measures such as environmental labelling schemes attempt to control consumption patterns by encouraging consumers to use goods and services that are less harmful to the environment.

In addition to these official measures, companies and other organisations may voluntarily adopt a variety of market-based measures to highlight their own contributions towards improving the environment. Various business sectors have made energy-saving agreements with the ministries and MOTIVA Oy, a special independent organisation set up to promote energy savings. Many companies are also committed to continuous environmental improvements through their active involvement in the EMAS or ISO 14001 environmental management systems.

The successful integration of environmental policies with sectoral and other economic policies is vital to ensuring that environmental policy goals are reached at least cost and that the effects of other policy measures on the environment are addressed. Especially economic instruments, like taxes and tradable permits, are environmentally effective and economically efficient policy instruments.

## **8 Regulation of sustainable agriculture and the importance of the social market participants**

Producer and food industry organisations and other stakeholders in the agriculture sector have a significant role in political decision-making. Such stakeholder groups have been particularly significant in agricultural policy as before Finland's accession to the European Union in 1995 the producer prices of agricultural products were decided in the agricultural income negotiations between the State and producer organisations.

Various stakeholders were also involved and tried to influence the new Government Programme drawn up after the Parliamentary election held in spring 2011. The Government implements the Programme by giving legislative proposals to the Parliament. The draft legislative proposals are circulated for comment to the relevant stakeholder groups so that they have the opportunity to have their say on the legislative proposal to be given. Any more extensive legislative proposals are prepared in working groups, with representatives from the relevant stakeholder groups.

The Finnish Parliament hears the stakeholder groups during the parliamentary proceedings of the legislative proposals. At the Parliament the preparation takes place in various Committees, where representatives of stakeholder groups are invited to be heard or statements on the legislative proposals are requested from the relevant stakeholders.

The decisions on the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union are made at the European Parliament and Council. Various stakeholder groups aim to influence the decisions through lobbying.

## **9 Other factors for sustainable agriculture**

### **9.1 Organic farming in Finland**

Of the cultivated area in Finland about 7.5 per cent is under organic production. Farms practising organic production are a little larger than farms on average. Only about 6 per cent of the total of 62,000 Finnish farms engage in organic production. Of the 3,700 farms that practise organic farming about 500 raise livestock in accordance with the organic production practice.

According to the new Government Programme of Finland, the Government is going to implement a development programme on the organic production sector, with the aim to increase the production to meet the demand. A considerable increase in the share of organic production is included in the strategic objectives of the Finnish agricultural policy. Key elements in the development work include the attractiveness of organic livestock production.

The logo for organic production (the sun logo) tells that the product is being controlled by the Finnish authorities. The logo may be applied for by actors who produce, manufacture, package or import organically produced products or have such products manufactured and who are included in the control system for organic production. The use of the European Union logo for organic products, the Euro Leaf, is mandatory in all pre-packaged organically produced foodstuffs manufactured in the European Union.

## **9.2. Promoting biofuels**

If interpreted in the broad sense, biofuels include wood as well. Finland is among the countries with the most abundant forest resources in Europe: forests cover 86 per cent of the surface area of Finland. Wood energy has a significant role in the whole Finnish energy production sector, because about a fifth of all energy used in Finland is produced using wood and wood-based energy sources. The greatest user of wood energy is forest industry, which utilises forest chips and wood-based by-products and waste liquors created in its processes for energy production. The aim of the Finnish Climate and Energy Strategy is, in particular, to significantly increase the use of forest chips and wind power. The main means to promote their use is tax benefits.

In Finland raw material from agricultural sources has been used quite little for the manufacture of biofuels. Small quantities of turnip rape have been used for this purpose. There are no bioethanol plants using cereal raw material in Finland. The few bioethanol plants we have use food industry by-products and household biowaste as their raw material. In Finland the use of biofuels is also promoted by means of tax benefits.



### **9.3. Reducing greenhouse gases from agriculture**

Agriculture sector is the second largest producer of greenhouse gases in Finland, after energy production. The share of agriculture in the greenhouse gas emissions in Finland has been about 7 per cent, while the energy sector accounts for about 83 per cent of the total emissions. Of the greenhouse gases created in agriculture the majority is carbon dioxide released from cultivated lands and nitrous oxide emissions from fertilisation. Gases created in the digestion of bovines and animal manure are important sources of methane. Emissions are also created in agriculture due to the use of fuels in tractors and cereal harvesting and electricity for cereal drying.

In the Finnish conditions significant amounts of fossil fuels need to be used in agriculture, which besides increasing the production costs leads to greater environmental impacts per unit produced. Even if as regards the total emissions the greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture are not as significant as those created in energy production, the emissions from agriculture are still very important in terms of the ecoefficiency of agricultural production.

There has been a considerable reduction in the greenhouse gas emissions from agricultural sources in Finland. The main reasons for this include the decrease in the number of animals, reduction in the use of artificial fertiliser and environmental measures implemented on farms. The most significant factor has been the decrease in the production volume of agriculture in general.

The energy programme for farms implements the energy savings objectives set for Finland by the European Union and nationally. The energy programme offers the farms the opportunity to have a farm energy plan prepared by an adviser specialised in energy issues. The plan defines the specific points in the farm's operations where energy can be saved as well as assesses the potential of the farm to increase the use and production of renewable energy. The State pays 85 per cent of the costs of preparing the energy plan, but no more than 1,100 euros.

In terms of the national economy the most cost-efficient way to reduce the emissions from the agriculture sector is by favouring grass cultivation on organic soil and creating a mechanism to prevent land clearing. The

main measure to this end are support payments and emissions charges. Other feasible and cost-efficient alternatives include biogas production from animal manure and reduction in the use of synthetic fertiliser in a way that the productivity is not weakened.

#### **9.4 Question of responsibility for the environment and Directive 2004/35/EU**

This Directive was implemented in Finland by legislation that entered into force on 1 July 2009, which is why there is no application practice for this legislation in Finland as yet.

#### **9.5 Renegotiations of the CAP and the aim for sustainable agriculture**

According to the Communication of the European Commission of November (COM (2010)672/5) on the common agricultural policy until 2020, the main challenges for the common policy include the environment and climate change. Even if the greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture have decreased by 20 per cent from the levels in 1990, further measures can and should be implemented in order to reach the ambitious energy and climate objectives of the EU. It is important to even more efficiently utilise the capacity of the agricultural area to contribute to the mitigation and adaptation measures and to take positive action by further reducing greenhouse gas emissions and improving the efficiency of the production through innovations relating to, for example, higher energy efficiency, production of biomass and renewable energy, carbon capture and protection of carbon sequestered in the soil. The objectives of the common agricultural policy include the sustainable management of natural resources and climate actions. The mitigation and adaptation actions relating to climate change will be continued to ensure that the agriculture sector will be capable of adapting to climate change

The content of the common agricultural policy to be applied after 2013 will only be known as we get to the codecision proceedings of the European Parliament and Council in 2012.