

Green Europe eyes farming revolution

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European Union Commissioner for Agriculture Dacian Ciolos talks to the media during a press conference at the European Union Commission headquarter in Brussels. In a radical overhaul of Europe's controversial Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), the European Commission on Thursday suggested a greener, fairer farming policy for the future, including a rethink of subsidies.

In a radical overhaul of Europe's controversial Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), the European Commission on Thursday suggested a greener, fairer farming policy for the future, including a rethink of subsidies.

"The CAP is not just for farmers, it is for all EU citizens," said [Agriculture](#) Commissioner Dacian Ciolos, issuing proposals which will be up for debate to help draft legislative proposals in mid-2011.

A new CAP is due to enter into force January 1, 2014 but with deficit-hit member states keen to cut spending, all eyes are on a programme that

currently gobbles up 40 percent or almost 60 billion euros (82 billion dollars) of the total European Union budget.

Ciolos offered no figures on his reform proposals but suggested three different options aimed at handing subsidies only to those in need, reducing market intervention and putting the [environment](#) at the centre of farming.

"European agriculture needs to be not only economically competitive but also environmentally competitive," Ciolos said.

Farmers protecting the environment will receive subsidies -- for maintaining green cover during the winter, rotating crops and creating permanent pastures and ecological fallows that are havens for plants, animals and insects.

Aid, currently based on criteria from the early 2000s, needs to be reviewed to include new members of the 27-nation bloc and to be made "fair and transparent.

"We need to ensure that public aid is targeted at active farmers who really need it," a Commission document said. "Support currently provided for under the rural development programmes will not be affected."

France, Germany and Spain are the CAP's main beneficiaries and all hope for a strong farm budget while Britain has traditionally called for lower farm spending.

Berlin's Secretary of State for Agriculture Robert Kloos said the proposals went in the right direction but he objected to any cuts in aid to bigger farms -- there are many in eastern Germany left over from the collectivist communist past -- and to attribute subsidies on the basis of

green criteria.

"Nobody will benefit if only the bureaucracy is reinforced," he said.

French Agriculture Minister Bruno Le Maire said however that many of the suggestions were in line with Franco-German thinking.

The two countries last year picked up 10.44 billion euros and 7.5 billion euros, respectively in CAP funding, while 7.48 billion euros went to Spain.

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