

**The Charter
of
European Agricultural Education**



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Fischler

Requirements for Agricultural Training

The concept of education and training as we understand it today starts with a basic education, which is followed by specialization and then continues in a learning process that accompanies us for the rest of our lives. The idea; that what we learn as children; sets us up for the rest of our lives is incorrect. On the contrary, the continuous learning process is of particular importance, as it is the only way that we can keep pace with technological and social developments.

For the European Commission – and I don't just mean the agricultural and rural development sectors – training is an interdisciplinary task reflected in a number of policy areas, particularly where jobs and the safeguarding of the material necessities for living are at stake.

I would like to quote from the conclusions to the summit meeting of heads of state or government, which took place in Luxembourg in 1997:

“The Union has the will to further develop the current European agriculture model and in doing so to attempt to improve internal and external competitiveness. European agriculture needs be a multifunctional, sustainable and competitive economic factor embracing the whole of the EU area, including regions with specific problems. The reform process introduced in 1992 must be continued, intensified, adapted and supplemented to include Mediterranean products.”

The new communications technologies are of great significance to the rural areas of Europe, since they allow distances to be bridged and bring peripheral areas closer to the centre. But they are by no means the only changes that challenge our education and training systems. To remain in a global context, we need only consider the multitude of opportunities that the opening of markets will offer if we can manage through the intelligent marketing of agricultural products to maintain sales in vital market segments and to develop new markets. New requirements with regard to production methods – quality standards, greater attention to environmental protection or health aspects, for example – make it necessary for all concerned to continuously upgrade and revise their knowledge. The processing and marketing of agricultural products is no longer the exclusive realm of the processing industry or the trade. The shift in these operations to the producers themselves calls for the corresponding know-how as well. Finally, the diversification of income sources to safeguard a reasonable standard of living in rural areas demands additional knowledge and skills. In the last two areas it is frequently a matter of relearning skills that have been forgotten over the years, that is to say traditional production and processing methods, and a revival of traditions and artisanal abilities. Good education and training thus provide an important basis for meeting the new challenges and for treating them as an opportunity rather than a threat.

Brussels, March 1999

Molterer

Modern Training as the Key to Success in Rural Areas

Modern agricultural training not only safeguards the future of farming populations but also provides an indispensable basis for maintaining the vitality and quality of life in rural areas. Agricultural training networks founded on basic education, advanced training, adult education and consultancy can considerably improve development prospects for rural regions.

For this reason the change in farming operations from basic producers to multifunctional service providers should be encouraged with a view to safeguarding the function of farming as the backbone and driving force behind rural development. In this context individual farming colleges have the important task not only of providing well qualified graduates, developing personality and teaching students to work in teams, but also of encouraging students to acquire new skills and of broadening their knowledge.

To prevent rural areas from lagging behind in terms of education, training systems inside and outside the agriculture sector must be available to anyone who is interested. They also need to be made more transparent. The European Charter for Agricultural Training therefore aims in addition at coordinating the cooperation between training establishments in the rural sector.

In view of the dynamism of the labour market in general, the adaptation of qualification structures needs to be speeded up. New information and communications technologies need to be used more intensively: the more effectively the different training platforms are interlinked, the better training projects will function in future. Computers and telecommunications are very much part of the future of rural areas. It is only through the systematic use of these new technologies that rural populations will have rapid access to information that will enable highly qualified and well paid jobs to be moved to the country and stimulate the return of skilled workers.

All-round education and professional qualifications are the key to economic and social security. Creativity, flexibility, a willingness to learn, initiative and the desire to work innovatively with others are more in demand than ever. With the increasing globalization of our society, this is the only way that Europe's farmers will be able to successfully maintain a high standard of living in rural areas.

Vienna, March 1999

Charter of European Agricultural Education & Training

I. Introduction

The future of European agricultural education and training is directly related to the European policies for agriculture and rural areas. Therefore, the following principles apply to education and training in agriculture.

1. Ensuring food supplies

The task of the agricultural industry is to offer high-quality foods that are produced taking the needs of the environment and animals into account. To provide food supplies to the rapidly growing world population, global food production must increase significantly.

2. Diversification

In addition to the provision of food supplies, agriculture's task is to redesign the rural areas, maintain our natural resources and living space, as well as to supply various services, for example in community and leisure areas. Agriculture and forestry are essential to a sustainable cyclical economy – starting from supply (e.g. energy supplies) and ending with recycling techniques (e.g. composting).

3. Agriculture & Rural Areas

Development of agriculture and rural areas are inextricably linked.

4. Importance of the land-based sector

Despite its decreasing share in the gross domestic product, agriculture is gaining social importance through its multi-functionality.

5. Integral Development

Economic, ecological and social development goes together. One-sided development can be unstable; integrated development is sustainable.

6. Network structures

Cooperation strengthens not only entire structures but also individual fields. This applies to agriculture (from basic production to refining and marketing) and the land-based sector, as well as the whole rural area.

7. Conditions for successful development

Development programmes are successful if they are accepted by the people. Identity, participation, self-confidence, awareness of strengths and opportunities, motivation and other "soft factors" are key elements of successful regional development.

8. Decentralisation

Complex and regionalised development creates new jobs, relieves population centres and enhances the quality of life in rural areas.

9. Proper management and use of the land

An evaluation of agriculture that only considers its industrial management efficiency does not do justice to the multi-functionality of the land-based sector. It is necessary to include political and economic criteria in order to assess the success of the multi-functional land-based sector.

Education is the Basis

II. The Function of European Agricultural Colleges

1. Professional training

European agricultural colleges facilitate learning for all people who intend to pursue a career in the land-based sector. The colleges are open learning centres where the exchange and transfer of knowledge is facilitated by teams of professionals in land based education and training.

European agricultural colleges, in addition to giving professional training, aim to develop students' key competencies (e.g. flexibility; adaptability; entrepreneurial skills; social and communication skills), and an awareness of the local and global environment and their responsibilities towards sustainable land use.

European agricultural colleges encourage students' awareness of the wider world, and develop international citizenship through trans-national exchanges, cooperation and work placements.

Students at European agricultural colleges learn through a combination of theory and practice, delivered within the college and in industrial placements.

European agricultural colleges train students to operate within an enterprise, keeping the balance between economic demands and environmental issues.

Because of the many requirements brought about by rapidly changing general conditions, agricultural education will become the most important resource in world-wide competition.

Modern training in agriculture ensures the future of people in the land-based sector and is, therefore, the basis for a viable rural area, worth living in.

2. Other functions

European agricultural colleges have a range of other functions. They are also centres; open to the whole community, for:

2.1. Experimentation and innovation

Research and development

2.2. Service

Information and resource centres (e.g. libraries, information and communication technology); accommodation; laboratory analysis; advice and guidance, etc.

2.3. Lifelong learning

Training at all levels; specialised training in a variety of subjects, etc.

2.4. Rural development

Environmental education, cultural events, consumer information etc.

European agricultural colleges work in partnership with a range of relevant bodies and institutions, e.g. governmental, regional authorities, employers, research institutions, schools and universities, at local, regional, national and international levels.

III. Characteristics of Agricultural Training Institutions

1. Mobility

1.1 Mobility of Students, Teachers and Instructors

Tailor-made training involves mobility. Student mobility on a European level implies teacher and instructor exchange as well.

1.2 National and International Networks of Schools

It is not possible for every school to offer everything. Therefore, it is necessary to cooperate with other schools that complement each other. The goal is basic training in the regional school and specialised training in the suitable complementary school.

1.3 Practice

Besides practical lessons, a training period at agricultural enterprises is essential for a comprehensive training. The promotion of training periods in European countries (and others) should be encouraged and facilitated.

1.4 Special Subject Seminars

Schools should agree on a certain number of special seminars on various subjects, to be offered each year on a national and international level. Students may apply to participate in whatever seminar they find interesting, both to improve their knowledge of a specific subject and also to have an opportunity to practise a foreign language they have learned.

1.5 Compatibility

We should strive for mutual recognition of training periods as well as the recognition of participation in courses (modules, special subject seminars): The development of a transferable and mutually agreed EU-Certificate of Agricultural Training remains a primary goal.

2. Contents and Methods

2.1. Modular System

Training modules enable colleges to offer efficient, specialised training to all students and make networks and mobility easier on a European level.

2.2. Educational Innovations

New forms of teaching (e.g. interactive learning programs, tele-teaching, student-centred learning) should be used to revolutionise teaching and learning. The role of the teacher must be transformed from merely imparting knowledge to teaching people how to learn.

2.3. Information Communication Technology

The use of ICT, with its many possibilities, should be promoted. Such training can bring tele-jobs to rural areas and connect the residents of remote areas to each other, to learning centres and to urban centres.

3. Administration

3.1. Autonomy

Each country's type of school autonomy should be used to determine regionally pertinent topics, carry out relevant projects and make better use of available resources.

3.2. Internal Organisation of Schools

There is a number of prerequisites for the implementation of various points mentioned above. Each country must determine which legal and budgetary conditions have to be created or adapted in order to achieve the goals outlined.

The Charter – a Model for the Development of European Agricultural Education and Training

The Charter stands as a model for agricultural education and training in the new Europe. Therefore, it pursues the aim to create expert guidance within EU education.

The Charter was developed by EUROPEA-International, the network for agricultural education and training, with the aim of placing modern education on a common basis. EUROPEA-International is an association of 15 national organisations that connects about 600 agricultural educational institutions throughout Europe. In the Charter, regional educational platforms outline a solid basis on which specific educational concepts can be built.

Signed in Somerset, England 20th February 1999

Country	Co-ordinator
Austria	Karl Friewald
Belgium	Georges Demeester
Denmark	Jakob Kjaer
Finland	Markku Jokela
France	Mary-Christine Thomas
Germany	Karlheinz Wilke
Greece	Mary Chism Pougouras
Ireland	Pradraig Gray
Italy	Murolo Giuseppe
Luxembourg	Georges Krack
The Netherlands	Madelon de Beus
Portugal	Luis Barradas
Spain	José Antonio Dominguez
Sweden	Claesson Claes-Göran
United Kingdom	Sukey Elstob