



AGRISKILLS

Supporting Arguments for Social Partners
to strengthen vocational education for
sustainable development in agriculture



Erasmus+

www.agriskills.eu

Imprint

Published by

PECO Institut e.V.
Luisenstr. 38
D – 10117 Berlin
www.peco-ev.de

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Federation of Independent Trade Unions in Agriculture / www.fnsz.org
Workers Education Trade & Training College / www.wetco.knsb-bg.org

Layout

BLICKFANG mediendesign
www.blickfang-mediendesign.de
Using Colour specifications by Studio Gaus
www.studiogaus.com

PECO Institut e.V. / AgriSkills / www.agriskills.eu / Berlin, 2016



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This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. The responsibility for the content of this publication lies exclusively with the author; the Commission is not liable for the further spread of the information contained therein.

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Introduction

Today's agriculture increasingly gets in the focus of public discussion. On the one hand it has a positive image as producer of good food, which is on the other hand questioned due to many negative developments, such as factory farming, waste of resources or food scandals. Often short-term individual business decisions are at the forefront of entrepreneurial activity, long-term operational considerations are excluded and social responsibility is fulfilled to a limited extent only. In order to maintain social acceptance and sustainably ensure its existence, agricultural production must adjust to the new requirements. Shifting towards sustainable agriculture, especially in vocational training is the way forward.

Social partners play a prominent role in vocational training. In the Member States they are involved in different ways in the development of training and education and play an important role in the delivery of education along with vocational training institutions. For the social partners in the European Social Dialogue in Agriculture, education is constantly a subject of negotiations.

This is exactly where the educational package **AgriSkills** comes in. It has been developed as part of a two-year ERASMUS+ project in transnational cooperation. The **strategic partnership** includes three unions, three educational institutions, a Chamber of Agriculture and an (organic) farm from Bulgaria, Spain and Germany, each with one to three experts from each institution. The educational package is aligned with the requirements of vocational education for sustainable development in agriculture and may be used in and transferred to different countries with very different training systems.

AgriSkills aims at providing, testing and spreading a European educational package that promotes sustainable thinking in agricultural education and training. Unlike other training tools, sustainability is integrated in the professional context, rather than being offered as extra content. This package uses the example of pig and cattle production in the context of sustainable development. Another goal is the integration of vocational education for sustainable development in agriculture in the regular training schemes. For this purpose, mainly the social partners and training institutions - both schools and work places need to be addressed. Now **AgriSkills** represents an educational package that shows decisive steps in this direction.

The vocational training systems in the three partner countries Germany, Bulgaria and Spain differ widely. The requirements for skills development, as defined in the national and **European Qualifications Framework (EQF)**, have been important references in developing **AgriSkills**.

For use in Germany the education package has been developed in the context of dual vocational education (first-level vocational training) to cover three **different levels**. In the partner countries Bulgaria and Spain **AgriSkills** has been developed for a lower level, but with special additional training units. Since it has been adjusted to harmonized European skills, **AgriSkills** may be integrated in other European education systems and was already tested in Spain and Bulgaria.

1. Sustainable Development

The final report of the World Commission on Environment and Development which was published under the title „Our Common Future“ (Brundtland Report) in 1987, made the term „sustainable development“ the **guiding framework** for a global future debate. The report assumes that humanity is capable „to create a future that is characterized by increasing prosperity, social justice and security ... a development that is able to meet the current needs without depriving later generations of the opportunity to meet to their own needs.”¹ In order to allow such a development, the report pays special attention to the relationship between environmental and social objectives.

Ever since the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, the term has become the **central model of the global environmental debate**. At that time 178 countries committed themselves to develop national strategies for sustainable development.

The main results of the conference were summarized in the Agenda 21. It provides the link between economic resilience, the preservation of the ecological viability of the ecosystem and social justice. These three aspects cannot be separated from each other or even played off against each other. Together they form the triangle of sustainability.

The sustainability triangle refers to the **equal consideration of three dimensions of ecology, economy and social issues** and is a fundamental principle of sustainable development. However, so far no agreement has been achieved on what the concrete contents of these dimensions should look like. What is certain is that the various interests may conflict. Therefore, the exact goals must be negotiated together between social groups. Process-based thinking and readiness for dialogue are therefore two important cornerstones of sustainable thinking.

The Agenda 21 approved at the Rio conference dedicated a special chapter to **workers and trade unions**.² The starting point is the understanding that the efforts to implement a strategy of sustainable development will come along with adaptation processes and open up room for manoeuvre for governments and companies, which will particular affect the workers. Therefore, trade unions, employers and governments need to work closely together to ensure a balanced implementation of the concept of sustainable development.

In the years after 1992, the term „sustainable development“ was used all too frequently. This also affected the agricultural sector, where the term now describes a mode of production that is almost exclusively focused on economic aspects, hence being anything but sustainable. Rightly environmental organizations therefore again and again complain about the lack of environmental sustainability, while trade unions criticize the lack of social sustainability. There is considerable need for action to actually put the political objective of sustainable agriculture in practice.

Given this development, the AgriSkills project faces the challenge to establish the concept of vocational education for sustainable development in this sector of the education system. An education unit was designed for a profession, sustainability of which has been developed only to a limited extent so far.

¹ World Commission on Environment and Development: „Our Common Future“ (Brundtland Report), Geneva, 1987, p. 1

² Agenda 21, 1992, chapter 29 Strengthening the role of workers and their trade unions, at: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/Agenda21.pdf>.

2. Education - Part and Parcel of Sustainable Development

In addition to focusing on the principles of sustainability, the European Union (EU) with the Lisbon Strategy has set the goal “to make the European Union the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world”³. Three main areas are the renewal and sustainability in the field of innovation as a driver of economic growth, the knowledge-based society as well as social cohesion and environmental protection. Education is a central key to achieving the objectives. Meanwhile, the Lisbon strategy has been further developed by ‘Europe 2020’⁴. While sticking to the content, the monitoring models were extended and shall be applied more consistently.

At the 2002 Copenhagen Summit the ministers of education defined the strengthening of the European dimension of vocational training as an essential objective. Decisive steps in this direction are

- To improve transparency of national education systems and existing vocational qualifications,
- To develop common tools for quality assurance and
- The principles for the recognition of informal and non-formal learning qualifications.

In order to create a single economic area with a common labour market, it is necessary to be able to compare education certificates. The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) provides the appropriate points of reference. It contains eight skill levels, eight being the highest.

In the education European debate learning outcomes (i.e. the actually available knowledge and skills) have increasingly gained priority over formal certificates in recent years. However, here there is still a lack of practical experience.

In addition to skill levels, the EU has defined eight key skills to achieve the objectives of the Lisbon strategy and the follow-up programs:

- mother tongue skills
- foreign language skills
- mathematical skills
- computer skills
- learning skills
- social and civic skills
- initiative and entrepreneurial skills
- cultural awareness and skills of expression.

The education and training systems of the EU Member States shall pay special attention to the development of those skills.

³ European Council: Lisbon-Strategy for Growth and Jobs, Lisbon 2000, at: www.eu2007.de/en/Policy_Areas/European_Council/Lissabon.html

⁴ See information on the Europe 2020 strategy at: <http://www.bmwi.de/EN/Topics/Europe/European-Economic-Policy/europe-2020,did=330824.html>.

3. Sustainable Development in Agriculture

The task of agriculture is to ensure the best possible supply of the population with food.⁵

With the common agricultural policy (CAP), the European Economic Community (EEC) wanted to strengthen the weakened agriculture after the Second World War. The first two decades were dedicated to the single market, the price policy for agricultural products and structural measures to increase productivity. Thanks to that policy the **shortage of food** in Europe could be overcome. In the 1970s however, new problems appeared. There was an overproduction which could not be compensated by international trade, due to the high level of prices on the world market. There was talk about grain mountains and milk lakes. In order to get to grips with the surplus problem, quantity caps for production were introduced (milk quotas and set-asides).

In the 1980s and 1990s the new objective of agricultural policy was **international competitiveness**. The EU withdrew from the price subsidies to reduce agricultural prices, and used the funds released from the agriculture budget for so-called equalization payments, to avoid a drastic structural break. Since these payments have been made directly to the farms, they are also called direct payments. These payments initially linked to specific products are contrary to the rules of the World Trade Organization (WTO), according to which no products are allowed to be subsidized. Meanwhile the direct payments have been decoupled. The central basis for calculating today's agricultural support is the size of the farmed land. This so-called area-based premium is largely paid regardless of the crop produced on that surface.⁶

It is true that in every policy change it was always underlined that social and environmental issues were taken into account and hence agriculture is adjusted sustainably. However, the current situation shows that many problems have not been solved:

- As before, agriculture is responsible for the extinction of wild plants and animals.
- The load of pollutants discharged by agriculture into the natural environment (e.g. soil and water) increases unabatedly.
- Despite overproduction in some regions of the world, 795 million people are undernourished worldwide⁷
- Agriculture is still one of the industries in Europe with a high rate of accidents at work.⁸
- The structural change in agriculture kills jobs, thus contributing to an impoverishment of the population especially in structurally weak rural areas.
- The concept of lifelong learning has not set in so far in agriculture, neither in theory nor in practice.
- The goal of harmonization of salaries to the general wage development has not been reached, resulting in many regions in poverty at old age.
- In order to make agriculture really sustainable, it is necessary to set in motion a process leading to a social agreement about how sustainable agriculture is supposed to develop at European, regional and local level. The crucial factor is that in addition to the economic dimension, the environmental and social dimensions shall be equally represented.

⁵ German Agriculture Act published in the Federal Gazette Part III, classification number 780-1, revised version, last amended by Article 358 of Regulation of 31 August 2015 (BGBl. I S. 1474).

⁶ Frieder Thomas, summarized from: IG Bauen-Agrar-Umwelt, *Strategien für Beschäftigungsanreize in der Gemeinsamen Agrarpolitik (Strategies to create job incentives in common agricultural policy)*, Berlin 2011, S.5, at www.peco-ev.de

⁷ See synopsis of 2016 Global Hunger Index at <http://www.welthungerhilfe.de/en/home-en.html>

⁸ European Commission/eurostat statistic explained: *Statistics on accidents at work, data extract of April 2015.*

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4. Vocational Education for Sustainable Development

4.1. Guidelines

Meanwhile and under the significant influence of the UNESCO Decade there is now a broad discussion about the education for sustainable development, which is also gaining importance in the field of vocational training.

The central tasks of vocational education for sustainable development include the **capability** of people to develop (further), not only to deal with **environmental and development** issues in the job, but also to act on the basis of what one has learned. The key word is “**shaping skills**”.

While in today’s vocational education and training the acquisition of information is paramount, it creates only the foundation of knowledge when it comes to Education for sustainable development.

Learning focused on sustainability aims at **learning through insight** (cognitive learning). Insight means here

- To realize and understand a situation⁹,
- To detect the cause-effect relationships,
- The meaning and
- The importance of a situation.

Cognitive learning is the basis for a goal-oriented behaviour and thus also the prerequisite for behavioural change.

Recognizing and understanding of a situation and the understanding of cause-effect-relationships is a complex process, particularly in vocational education, because the operational and professional practice must be recognized and interpreted in its theoretical contexts.

We can speak of cognition when contents can be successfully linked at different levels, thus leading to concrete action plans and instructions.

In order to capture complex processes, learning of methods and tools, independent learning and teamwork shall be particularly promoted. Hence, the development of **social skills** plays a central role in vocational education for sustainable development.

Sustainable Education creates the prerequisites for not destroying learning skills, the pleasure of learning and the willingness of learners, but to **promote the knowledge** about what deeper and longer-lasting learning can look like. This exactly is the focus of vocational education for sustainable development: It aims at promoting the joy of lifelong learning.

An understanding of learning as a process guided by the principle of sustainability will develop capabilities, skills and the willingness to go beyond the level of volatile knowledge which can just be reproduced in an exam during a short period of time. The aim is to put the student in a position to **reflect on what he or she has learned** and to represent and apply it with the different methods and tools.

In the process of sustainable education both teachers and learners are **cognizant subjects of learning processes**.

⁹ Situation is an interdisciplinary term to describe the entirety of all statements regarding a limited area of subjects

4.2. Methods of Vocational Education for Sustainable Development (BBNE)

In implementing the German ESF Programme “Promotion of vocational education for sustainable development” the following methods of education for sustainable development shall be used in the training process:

- Identification of a subject
- Development of problem-oriented questions
- Development of methods to study the issue
- Research and investigative activities in small groups
- Communication Platforms
- Backup of research intentions
- Media-based and participant-oriented presentations
- Backup through learning diaries
- Planning, organization carrying out and evaluating a panel discussion (if there is time)
- Evaluation of the teaching project¹⁰

These methods have been used as the basis for **AgriSkills**. They have been adapted and integrated into the educational package as far as possible.

4.3. European localization of AgriSkills

Another reference for the development of **AgriSkills** was the discussion about a **European training programme**. In this process the **European Qualifications Framework (EQF)** played a major role **as a reference tool** to compare the qualification levels of different qualifications systems. He is supposed to promote both lifelong learning and equal opportunities in the knowledge-based society as well as the further integration of the European labour market.¹¹ The EQF defines reference levels to cover the entire system of educational outcomes. Each level is covered by descriptors that refer to knowledge, skills and competences. In order to implement the EQF, the individual nation states developed national Qualifications Frameworks (NQF) based on the EQF.

The following **objectives** can be derived from the explanations of the EQF and the NQF (Germany):

- Equivalencies and differences of qualifications shall be made transparent.
- The permeability of education systems shall be supported.
- Reliability shall be achieved by quality assurance and quality development.
- The qualification processes shall focus on learning outcomes (outcome orientation).
- The mobility of students and employees shall be encouraged.
- Access to and participation in lifelong learning of everybody shall be improved.

¹⁰ Peter, H./Moegling, K./Overwien, B .: *Political Education for Sustainable Development Formation at the interface between economics, social justice and ecology, series: Erfahrungsorientierter Politikunterricht (Experience-Based Politics Classes), Volume 4, Immenhausen / Kassel 2011.*

¹¹ *Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning, Strasbourg, April 23 of 2008.*

As a consequence, all training units in the vocational education and training shall be linked with the EQF and possibly to the national qualifications framework. Therefore the following knowledge, skills and competences were in the foreground when developing the educational package AgriSkills as target parameters in relation to the EQF / NQF level 4/5:

Students shall

- acquire a wide range of theoretical and factual knowledge in a working and living environment,
- be guided towards independent action within the guidelines of working and training contexts that are generally known, but may change,
- acquire a range of cognitive and practical skills required to generate solutions to specific problems in a working and learning environment and
- acquire social skills that foster team work and enable them to get involved in shaping the learning or working environments, to offer continuous support to explain processes and events and to communicate comprehensively about a situation.

In order to implement the various policies of the European Union, in particular the political agenda for growth, jobs, justice and social inclusion, the EU's ERASMUS+ programme shall make a contribution. ERASMUS + promotes actions in the field of general and vocational education and training in Europe in three key areas, formulated as Key actions (= KA):

KA 1 - Learning mobility of individuals

With this intervention, the competences of the participants shall be increased and their attitudes and perceptions shall be altered. It aims at promoting the (professional and geographical) mobility of students and staff.

KA 2 - Cooperation to promote innovation and exchange good practice

This intervention aims at changing institutions, educational approaches, methods, contents and practices.

AgriSkills has been assigned to this key action as a strategic partnership to develop an innovation and could be financed with the respective funds of the EU program.

KA 3 - Support of political reforms

The supported actions aim at improving systems at national level and developing a European dimension.

¹² See. www.DQR.de

¹³ See. *Erasmus+ Guide, 2014, p.6*

4.4. The role of social partners in vocational education and training

In the process of professional (initial) training the social partners assume an important function at both national and European level. Since the partners **pursue interests that are partly identical, but partly also conflicting**, it is the task of the social partners to bring together the various interests in a **common dialogue** and a uniform content-based, methodological and organizational education framework.

While entrepreneurs are interested in the availability of well-trained **professionals** for their production processes, it is important for the employees to have skills that allow them a long-term use of their capacity to work, thus improving and maintaining their **employability**.

At the same time it is also in the interest of companies with regard to necessary operational structural adjustments, to rely on a workforce able to cope with these adjustment processes.

In a dual education system, most of the practical vocational training should take place at the workplace. That part is the responsibility of the company. The entrepreneurs should support employees in their education and training efforts.

The theoretical training is carried out mainly in schools. Here, a link between theoretical and practical education should be established.

4.5. Vocational Education and Training and the European Social Dialogue in Agriculture

In the sectoral social dialogue of agriculture social partners meet at the European level to discuss relevant and pending issues which affect them. The social dialogue is firmly rooted in the European Union policy, social partners are consulted for important political decisions that are relevant for them. They also have the right to enter into agreements that may well become law.

One focus of the social dialogue agriculture is **vocational training**. Already in 2002 the social partners made an agreement on vocational training in agriculture to raise the level of qualification of employees in agriculture.¹⁴ They suggested to include the agricultural employers “and workers” organizations in the organization of education and training (different procedures in each member country). The involvement or consultation of social partners was to be made mandatory at the various levels of organization in education and training (in Europe):

- Development of reference systems for professional qualification certificates,
- Development of training schemes,
- Assessment of education and training,
- Organization of examination juries,
- Organization of industrial internships.

¹⁴ See *European agreement on vocational training in agriculture, Brussels 2002*, at: http://www.agripass-online.eu/docs/agreement_vocational_training.pdf.

Considerable **problems in the comparability** of qualifications in European agriculture became evident. The education systems as well as the structures of formal qualification certificates differ widely across Europe. In addition to modular systems, there are training courses of many years leading to a degree. The relationship between company and school education also differs very significantly in each country.

In addition, there are several million migrant workers in agriculture, who in the course of their (migrant) working life have acquired skills they cannot prove formally.

In this respect, the social partners agreed in 2007 in a resolution to introduce a so-called **Agripass CV**. This will allow employees to have technical skills they have acquired in the exercise of their professional activities recognized in a “validation process”.¹⁵

Unfortunately, these approaches repeatedly get stalled in many European negotiations. At the same time a social partnership approach, as described in the agreement and the resolution, is getting more and more urgent, due to the following developments:

- Integration of the European labour market continues to progress.
- There is no doubt that good education and training is an important basis for sustainable growth.
- The number of unemployed, particularly young people, in many European countries is still unacceptably high.
- Migrant workers acquire much informal knowledge, but have little chances that those qualifications are formally recognized.

¹⁵ See *Committee on the sectoral social dialogue in agriculture.: Motion GEOPA-COPA and EFFA, Brussels 2007 under: http://www.effat.org/sites/default/files/news/9120/resolution_en.pdf*

5. The educational package AgriSkills

The “educational package AgriSkills - vocational education for sustainable development” is based on several local, regional, national and European discussion contexts and development processes:

- The ongoing structural change in agriculture, which requires new training forms,
- The criticism of current education - coupled with the demand for a stronger orientation of vocational training on sustainable development and organic agriculture - and
- A European discussion on professional and personal skills as well as their transparency and implementation in national education systems.

Using the example of cattle and pig production, AgriSkills points out opportunities of sustainable training concepts including economic, environmental and social dimensions. In addition to technical skills, personal skills (such as social skills, networked thinking, responsibility and teamwork) required particularly for sustainable educational are developed.

The complete educational package consists of five parts:

- Instructor Guide
- Education program (teaching materials)
- Learning Software
- Practice Test Analysis
- Supporting Arguments (Vocational training and education for sustainable development in agriculture for social partners)

All materials are available at www.AgriSkills.eu.

The web site also includes the learning software, which can be used separately from the training activity. The content of the educational software follows the structure of the five days of the training course and may be included in the classes as required.

The contents of the five training modules or teaching days are structured as follows:

1. Introduction to Sustainability and Animal Production
2. Sustainability in livestock farming
3. Sustainability in livestock feeding
4. Marketing and added value
5. Sustainable farming

In addition to the table of contents, methodological or didactic priorities arising from the guidelines for vocational education for sustainable development may be allocated to each day:

1. One’s own position and discussion
2. Information becomes knowledge
3. How to recognize relationships
4. Knowledge, risks and actions
5. Reflection

Day 1 - Introduction to Sustainability and Animal Production

One's own position and discussion

Students define their own level of knowledge about keeping, feeding and marketing and position themselves on the topic of sustainable agriculture.

They are supposed to put their own ideas and concepts of sustainable development and agriculture in a relationship. Using different methods they shall articulate and share their knowledge and their opinion on the subject as well as recognize and reflect the equivalence of the three dimensions of ecology, economy and social aspects.

Day 2 - Sustainability in livestock farming

Information turns into knowledge

In a group or farm rally students gather information about the demands of conventional and organic fattening pigs and beef cattle to the environment. In group work they analyse the information and relate it to the social requirements. These are formulated in particular in national and European laws.

Along with the recognition and understanding of various issues the necessary knowledge to solve problems will be obtained.

Using checklists for risk assessment and using the "risk assessment" task of the educational software, students will become aware of their practical work in relation to the animal in this process and learn to cope with potential hazards.

Day 3 - Sustainability in livestock feeding

Recognize interrelationships

To motivate the students, a game dealing with the use of natural resources and their equitable distribution is offered initially. Then existing knowledge about digestion, feeding and soil is reactivated and applied under new aspects.

The students are made aware of the environmental and social consequences of animal production. They realise the global context and the regional effects of their actions and their own activities in agriculture.

Day 4 - Marketing and added value

Knowledge, risks and actions

Based on an analysis of their own shopping behaviour marketing channels and opportunities for agricultural products are presented.

Using various playful methods the students shall experience first entrepreneurial ideas and realize via their general areas of responsibility what interactions may trigger their daily activities and which options are open to them.

In the game "LUCKY PIG" simulates different working situations - be it a conventional or organic production farm- using event cards to play through risks and uncertainties of economic operation. The participants may use their newly acquired knowledge to make the right decisions.

Day 5 - Sustainable farming

Reflection

Using different methods, the exercise shall promote and deepen self-reflection and critical analysis of one's own learning activity. The work results of the prior day shall be considered and analysed again in their entirety. Using alternating methods (e.g. comic strips, learning diary) and different social forms (single, pair and group work) the teaching contents of the recent days is consolidated). The different variants create space for teachers and students to consolidate and check what they have learned.

6. Proposed Actions

Again and again the national and European social partners have advanced the process of vocational training in recent years. However, changes of people, different political ideas and changes in the allocation of subsidies and grants have often resulted in good processes being stalled and correct and important approaches not being followed up with the necessary vigour.

The **agreement with social partners on vocational training adopted in 2002** is still up to date. However, the good proposals have not yet been implemented in all details. The European Commission has added **new requirements**, such as the European classification of Skills, Competences and Occupations (ESCO). It describes the most important competencies, skills and qualifications for a variety of professions. The catalogue for agriculture is being developed with the participation of agrarian social partners.

The introduction of the **Agripass** is currently not further pursued by employers, although this had been an initiative of the employers' side, mainly driven by the British employers' organization (NFU). The concern of Agripass to improve the transparency of vocational training between the Member States, continues to be an important objective in European education policy, especially against the background that millions of migrant workers in European agriculture acquire knowledge and skills during their professional activity, but have no chances that these skills are recognized.

The works of the **Sector Skills Council Agriculture (SSC-AGRI)** have not made further progress either. The Skills Council was supposed to monitor and evaluate the new developments in agriculture. Conclusions were planned to be included in new training regulations or education courses.

In a **critical review** it should be determined, what achievements have been made in the field of agricultural education and training in the 14 years since the agreement of the social partners was signed. Together the social partners should consider **which tasks need to be fulfilled** to ensure that the development process can continue, and how the still valid objectives can be achieved. They should decide which innovative and educational concepts should be pursued at European level. Of course, professional education for sustainable development is a cornerstone in that process.

It is up to the social partners in agriculture to make **better use of the structures** developed by the EU. ERASMUS+ offers excellent opportunities for that purpose. By expanding and developing further **strategic partnerships** reforms shall be encouraged in each Member State, and discussions about the contents shall be further developed.

The social partners shall promote **European exchange of students and teachers** much more, to make good practice and innovative ideas available across countries.

On top of the funding opportunities under ERASMUS+ the social partners have the opportunity to work for **additional sources of funding**. The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) provides an opportunity for that purpose. Trade unions have been demanding in the social dialogue that the nation states shall include **training courses for workers** as mandatory in the programs.

