



CHURCH of IRELAND GENERAL SYNOD
CHURCH in SOCIETY COMMITTEE
European Affairs Working Group

**STATEMENT ON COMMON AGRICULTURAL POLICY REFORM: THE
THREAT TO RURAL LIFE**

Changes in EU support for farmers are likely to have serious implications for life in rural Ireland, north and south. In a statement issued today the Church of Ireland says there is an urgent need for more public awareness of the considerable changes likely to take place. The following statement was issued by the European Affairs panel on the Common Agricultural Policy: -

We believe that, as a matter of urgency, public opinion should be made aware of the very considerable changes that are likely to take place in the manner in which financial support for farmers is provided by the EU, and of the serious implications these changes may have for life in rural Ireland, north and south.

The process known as ‘decoupling’, whereby the subsidisation of agriculture will no longer be linked to the production of crops and the rearing of animals will, we believe, inevitably cause a further migration from the countryside unless adequate steps are taken to counterbalance such forces. In addition, if ‘modulation’ is implemented there is a risk that, in time, up to one fifth of EU funding currently received by Irish farmers by direct payment could be diverted to a central pool in Europe, with no guarantee that it would return to Ireland for rural development.

The inducement to farmers, especially younger farmers, to stay on the land is already gravely affected by the sharp reduction in farm incomes that has been occurring for several years. Furthermore, the forthcoming enlargement of the European Union, which we strongly support, cannot but have an adverse effect on the share of EU funding directed at farmers in Ireland.

Unless effective measures are taken, both at national and European levels, to promote rural development, we foresee a further deterioration in the sustainability, not to speak of the quality, of rural life in many parts of Ireland, with consequent impoverishment of many communities. The implications of what may well result from the current mid-term review of the workings of the Common Agricultural Policy are very considerable, and we have been made particularly aware of how they may impinge on the life of our parishes. But our concern is a wider one, and related to the danger that family farms of all sizes may disappear, and to our belief that the farming community should be enabled to continue to play the vibrant part in Irish society that is so vital for the wellbeing of the country.