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## EU-25

### Agricultural Situation

#### Forest Action Plan gets Positive Reception but Some Criticism for Weakness

### 2006

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**Report Highlights:**

In June 2006 the European Commission adopted an EU Forest Action Plan (FAP) to demonstrate its commitment to enhancing sustainable forest management. The Action Plan focuses on four main objectives: to improve long-term competitiveness, to improve and protect the environment, to contribute to the quality of life and to foster communication and coordination. The Commission also proposes key actions to be implemented jointly over the five year period, 2007-2011.

The FAP is received positively from industry and stakeholders. However the Confederation of European paper Industries says the action plan seems rather weak as it relies mostly on Member States to take action and limits the role of the Commission.

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Includes PSD Changes: No  
Includes Trade Matrix: No  
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[E3]

## Background

Forests currently cover 37.8 percent of the EU's land area. The forest area of the EU Member States (MS) has been steadily increasing over the last decades. According to recently published reports, the total forest cover in the EU increased by 2,3 million ha during the period of 2000-2005. Forest cover varies greatly among the MS ranging from 73,9 percent and 66,9 percent in Finland and Sweden, to 10,8 percent in the Netherlands and 11,8 percent in Denmark.

About 60 percent of the forests in the EU are in the ownership of roughly 15 million private forest-owners. Private forest holdings have an average of 13 ha, but many privately owned forests are less than 3 ha. Forestry and forest-based industries employ about 3,4 million people and the EU produces about 20 percent of the world's industrial roundwood, being the second biggest producer after the US. Despite these large quantities of production, the average annual volume of timber harvested in the EU is only slightly over 60 percent of the annual forest growth.

## The EU Forest Action Plan

On June 15, 2006 the European Commission adopted a new five-year (2007-2011) Forest Action Plan (FAP). The idea is to provide a coherent framework for the implementation of forest-related actions and services, as an instrument of coordination between Community actions and the forest policies of the Member States. This new plan follows the revision of the European Forestry Strategy adopted in 1998, based on the forest multifunctionality and sustainable forest management for the development of society.

The overall objectives of the FAP are to support and enhance sustainable forest management and the multifunctional role of forests. The FAP is based on a common vision of forestry: Forests for society, long-term multifunctional forestry fulfilling societal need, and supporting forest-related livelihoods.

The Action Plan has four main objectives:

- To improve the long-term competitiveness
- To improve and protect the environment
- To contribute to the quality of life
- To foster coordination and communication

Under each of the four main objectives the European Commission has identified a number of actions:

Improving the long-term competitiveness:

- Encourage the research and technological development.
- Promote the exchange and assess experience of non-wood forest goods and services.
- Promote the use of forest biomass for energy generation.
- Foster cooperation between forest owners and education and training in forestry.

Improve and protect the environment:

- Facilitate EU compliance with the obligation on climate change mitigation of the Kyoto Protocol.
- Support the exchange on the Natura 2000 implementation.
- Work on establishment of a European Forest Monitoring System with harmonized and coordinated information.
- Enhance the protection of forests by developing a European Forest Fire Information System.

Contribute to the quality of life by preserving and improving the social and cultural dimensions of forests:

- Encourage environmental education and information efforts.
- Maintain and enhance the protective function of forests.
- Explore the potential of urban and peri-urban forests.

Foster coordination and communication by improving coherence and cross-sectoral cooperation.

- Strengthen the role of the Standing Forest Committee (SFC).
- Establish focal points for coordination between the commission and the Member States (MS).
- Apply an open method of coordination to National Forest Programs.
- Strengthen the EU profile in international forest related processes.
- Encourage the use of wood and other forest products from Sustainable Forest Management (SFM).
- Improve information exchange and communication by developing a Community forestry communication strategy.

Industry and stakeholders have generally received the FAP in a positive way. They have had the opportunity to participate and give their opinion during an open consultation before the FAP was presented.

The Confederation of European Paper Industries (CEPI) says the proposed action plan seems rather weak as it relies mostly on MS to take action and limits the role of the Commission to studying, assessing and exploring, facilitating, encouraging supporting etc. CEPI recognize that some focus has been put on coordination and on communication.

CEPI also pronounces that the forest sector, in the eyes of the Commission, is basically the forest owners and that little consideration had been granted to downstream users, including the industry. However this should be counterbalanced by a communication from DG ENT as a follow-up to the evaluation study of the Communication of 1999 on the competitiveness of the sector. CEPI declare that DG ENT will probably not come out with this before the High Level Group on Energy, Environment and Competitiveness will conclude its work in the end of 2007.

The Swedish Forest Industries Federation is also generally positive and says that if the action plan gets implemented there will be a better platform for getting an overall picture on forestry related issues within the framework on all the different directives and constitutions where forestry related issues are affected. The Federation emphasizes the fact that "encouraging the long term competitiveness" is the first of the four main objectives is an important signal to ameliorate the competitiveness. They also think the main objective "to improve and protect the environment" draws the conclusion that increased production would be good for the environment, because of the forests ability to absorb carbon. The Federation considers the key point in the action plan to be the point about fostering coordination and communication to get a positive outcome of the action plan.

The European Forest Based Sector drafted a paper on a Forest Directors meeting in Austria in June 2006. The Forest Directors appreciate the Commissions initiative to develop a long-term vision EU-FAP. They say there is a high political commitment in a number of policy fields to favor the use of renewable raw materials amongst which wood and wood based products play a prominent role. The quality of sustainable forest management, the processing of wood and wood based products and the innovation potential within the sector are well suited to carry the forest based sector successfully into the coming decades, however the downside of the medal reveals more of 30 percent of unused forest resources, an ambiguous perception of the sector by society and its decreasing attractiveness as

workplace for young generations. The Forest Directors meeting conclude by saying they would hope that the foreseen Council resolution on the EU FAP will concretize the key action into clear commitments that can be measured and evaluated, on Commission and MS level.

To read more about the EU Forestry Action Plan go to:

[http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/fore/action\\_plan/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/fore/action_plan/index_en.htm)

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