

Different forms of national agriculture

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After the Second World War, agriculture was still a major economic component of the national policies of the Six. In 1960, the agricultural sector employed one-fifth of the workforce in Europe. However, European agricultural structures varied from one country, even from one region, to another, whether with regard to the size of farm units, their level of mechanisation or the type and yield of the products. Similarly, the level of government intervention varied greatly. This agricultural heterogeneity had already proved a failure in the early 1950s, with the 'Green Pool' proposal designed to launch a common organisation of agricultural markets in Europe. These disparities, and the conflicts of interests that arose, explain the difficulties that were encountered, several years later, in the introduction of the common agricultural policy (CAP) as part of the common market. The differences included:

- the size of farm units;
- the level of mechanisation;
- the proportion of farmworkers in the total population;
- the production costs of agricultural products;
- the coverage rate of national requirements;
- the volume of agricultural products exported.

The Netherlands and France had the most efficient agricultural sectors and were most geared towards exports. Consequently, those countries demanded the rapid implementation of the CAP, from which they realised that they would be the first to benefit, primarily to avoid a crisis in overproduction. Furthermore, France saw the CAP as an essential counterweight to the free movement of industrial products.

Their European partners were less enthusiastic, because the CAP would force them to abandon their refund policy. Italy could therefore no longer obtain cereals and meat in exchange for its industrial products. Germany also wanted to keep the option of securing supplies at low prices on the world market, in particular from countries importing Germany's industrial products. Neither Denmark, the largest exporter of agricultural products, nor the United Kingdom, the largest importer, were part of the agricultural common market.