

**Rural development policy in Italy after Agenda 2000: first results for the period
2000-2003**

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ABSTRACT

In Italy the process of devolution to regional authorities lead to a regional management of community programmes for rural areas. This led to a high fragmentation of rural policy and a regional diversification of policy strategies. In such framework this paper aims at providing a first appraisal of the results of Rural Development (RD) policies in Italy, with particular reference at the management process of regional programmes and at the degree of territorial and sectorial integration between different programmes and measures, not only those cofinanced by EAGGF.

The objective is to identify best practice and limits of the actual implementation and use this evidence to draw conclusion on the necessary revision of RD policies, in terms of design and management rules and tools, after the Mid Term Review.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Agenda 2000, which defined rural development policy as the “second pillar” of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), launched the 1999 reform of community structural and rural development policy. As a matter of fact, since the reform, the policy programming instruments for rural development measures have been subject to a unification process that combines all structural measures from separate legislative acts under a single legislative document, the Regulation on rural Development (Reg. no. 1257/99). This document constitutes the legislative framework for Community rural development support for 2000 – 2006, but fails to introduce truly innovative elements for agriculture and rural area policy, the instruments for which can be seen as a continuation of the previous period.

The objectives of new rural development policy on the one hand mirror former goals of Community structural policy (improvements to productive structures and higher quality output, reconversion and re-channelling of agricultural output, the introduction of new technology), while at the same time reflecting concerns for sustainable rural development to be pursued by an integrated approach to territory (diversification of activity, strengthening the social fabric of rural areas, the promotion of sustainable agriculture that observes environmental criteria, the promotion of equal opportunities between the gender).

The recent evolutions in the EU Rural Development policies (Fischler reform and Second European Conference on Rural Development in Salzburg: “Planting seeds for rural futures”) brought about a few important changes: in the future measures for rural development will be delivered, out of the cohesion policies, through ad hoc regional and/or national programmes, will apply in all rural areas of the enlarged Europe and bring support for rural areas through bottom-up local partnerships (based on LEADER experience) into the EU mainstream. Furthermore, its delivery shall be based on a single programming, financing and control system and on a single Fund.

In such framework, an assessment of the state of the art in the implementation in Member States of the complex set of measures attaining at rural development can provide useful elements for the shaping of new delivery procedures of such policy and for the definition of its future content. This paper aims at providing a first appraisal of the results of Rural Development (RD) policies in Italy, based on the

information acquired from the authors within their activities of technical and scientific support to Regional and National Administration for the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of programmes. More specifically the data available attain to the following areas:

- programming data for all regional programmes in Italy (both RDPs and ROPs);
- monitoring data for all regional programmes;
- evidence from programme evaluation and from the exercise of self evaluation conducted at regional level;
- experience acquired by the two authors supporting national and regional programming implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

These data will be used to appraise the RD policy objectives design and implementation in Italy, with particular reference at:

- the analysis of the financial endowment and spending by category of intervention;
- the management process of regional programmes, with particular reference at the institutional innovation arising from implementation of rural measures;
- the implementation phase with a special focus on the degree of territorial and sectorial integration between different programmes and measures, not only those co-financed by EAGGF.

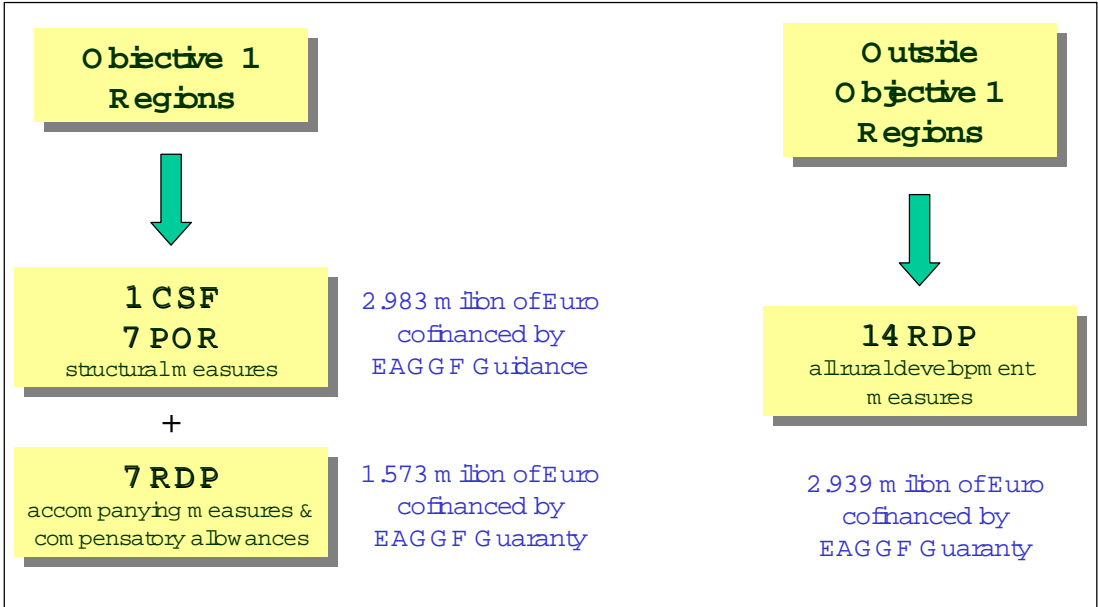
The objective is to identify best practice and limits of the actual implementation and use this evidence to draw conclusion on the necessary revision of RD policies, in terms of design and management rules and tools, in view of the future programming period. Our focus is on institutional aspects.

2. An overview of programmes implementation in Italy

In Italy the process of devolution to regional authorities lead to a regional management of community programmes for rural areas. This implied to a high fragmentation of rural policy together with a regional diversification of policy strategies. In fact all the Regions in the Centre-North of Italy apply rural measures as part of a comprehensive Rural Development Plan (RDP) for the whole region, cofinanced by EAGGF- Guaranty section. Within Objective 1 Regions, RDPs

contain only accompanying measures and others rural development measures are integrated in Structural Funds programming (Regional Operational Programme) and cofinanced by EAGGF- Guidance section.

Figure 1 - The programming system in Italy



The majority of Italian regions have opted for the horizontal application of measures across the territory. Some exceptions are to be found mainly in the programmes of the objective 1 regions. These envisage integrated projects seeking territorial growth to be achieved by an integrated use of measures, which in some cases include agriculture and rural areas. The criteria used by the regions to select the areas where to start up projects are extremely heterogeneous (ranging from the selection of specific territories to the simple sharing of funds among the provinces) and suggest the lack of an overall strategy.

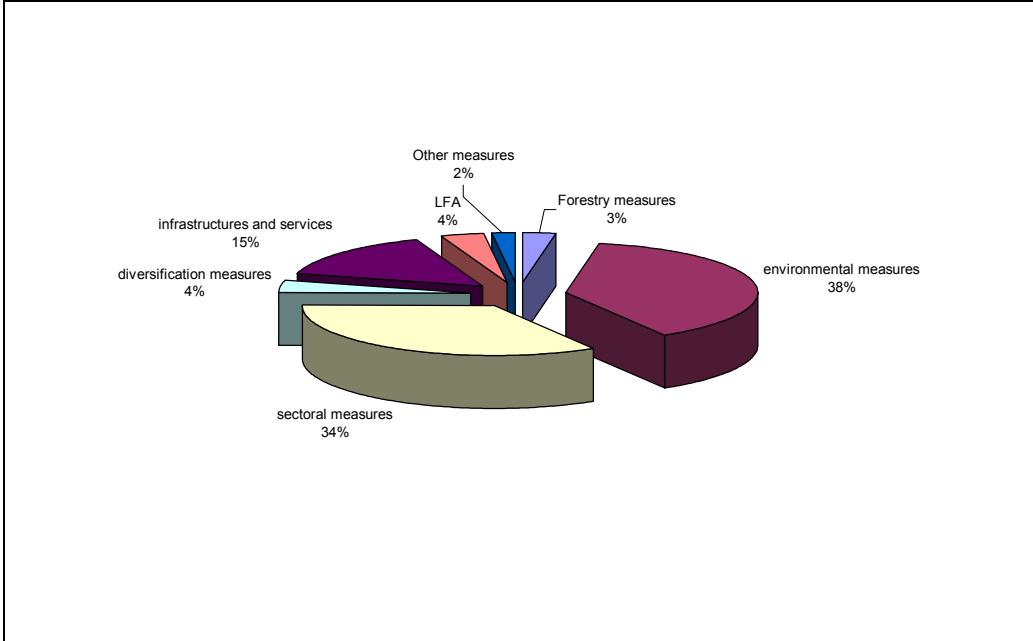
To provide an overall picture of Rural Development programmes in Italy we aggregated financial allocation for each region by category of measures. More specifically the single measures were classified according to the specific objective they pursue. As an example forestry measures were classified as environmental measures if aimed at enhancing the protective and ecological role of forests, and within other forestry measures if focused on productive aspects. We considered the following categories:

- *sectorial measures*: which are those measures expressly aimed at the improvement of sectorial competitiveness such as investment in agricultural

holding and food processing, start-up assistance for young farmers, early retirement, land improvement and reparation;

- *environmental measures*: including all the measures pursuing environmental objectives (agri-environment; afforestation and measure t – “protecting the environment”);
- *diversification measures*: we included in this category all those actions that, through the incentive provided to diversification of rural activities, direct their effects towards the more wider rural economy (encouraging tourist and craft activities, marketing of quality agricultural products, diversifying agricultural activities and activities close to agriculture);
- *infrastructures and services*: includes measures contributing to the bettering of the quality of life in rural areas through the provision of services for rural population and farmers (setting-up of farm relief and farm management services; basic services for rural economy and population; financial engineering). The present category comprises also interventions aimed at improving the infrastructures supporting agricultural activities (development and improvement of rural infrastructure connected with agricultural development; managing agriculture water resources, restoring agricultural production potential and introducing prevention instruments) and the renovation of villages and protection and conservation of rural heritage, as a base for the tourism valorisation of a given area;
- *Less favoured areas*: compensatory allowances;
- *Forestry measures*: investment in forests and other support measures for forestry;
- *Other measures*: evaluation and ongoing measures.

Figure 2 - The programming in Italy: Financial endowment by category of intervention



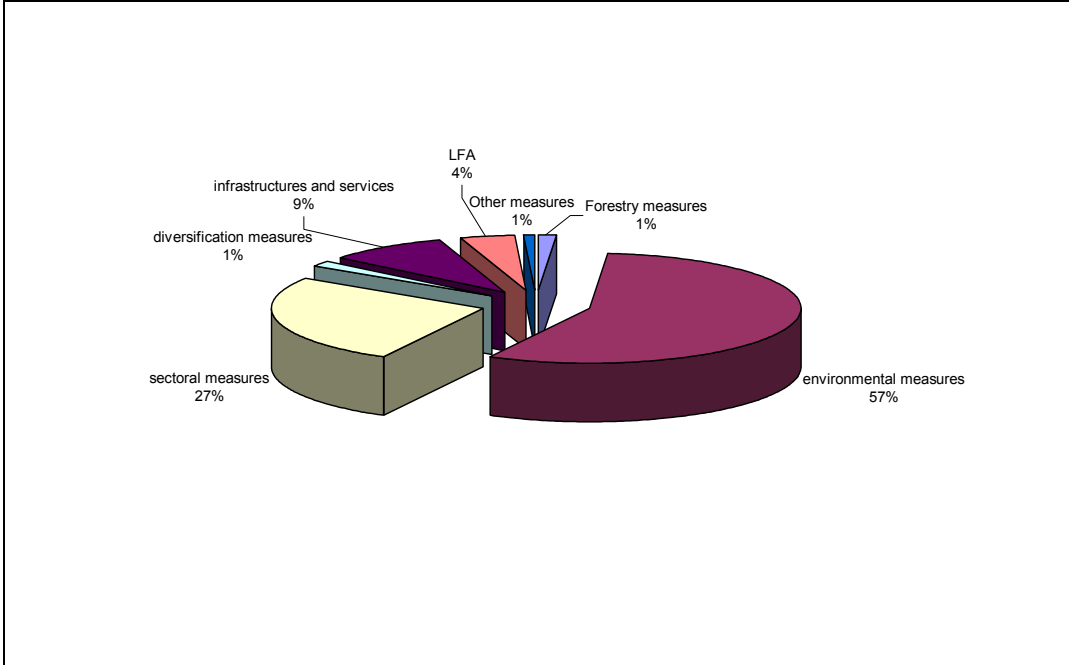
Source: INEA, based on RDPs and objective 1 ROPs

In the light of events in Italy from the available evidence on the implementation of the complex packet of rural measures it would appear that Community rural development policy has still a strong sectorial bias. In fact, if we look at the distribution of financial endowment by category of measure (figure 1), it appears that the funding allocation (4% of total) for diversification measures likeliest to promote balanced growth, whether sectorial, territorial or social, is minimal compared to that for sectorial modernisation measures (34%) or that for interventions such as accompanying measures (34%), which in simple terms are little more than handouts to farmers.

In total public funding available for rural development measures in Italian programmes amount at 13.716 million euro, while total payments for the period 2000-2003 are about 6.000 million euro. The distribution of spending among categories of interventions shows that the environmental measures are the fastest spending ones. It should be noticed that the strong relevance of previous accompanying measures played a great role on such positive performance. In fact the total spending on accompanying measures amounts at almost 70% of the programmed resources and 80% of such spending attains at previous commitments. Another point worth of consideration is that the implementation of diversification measures is delayed; expenditure for this category amounts at 1% of total spending

for rural development in Italy, which accounts for only 17% of the total budget devoted to such measures.

Figure 3 - The implementation of rural policy in Italy: Public spending by category of intervention



Source: INEA, based on AGEA and IGRUE

3. Main considerations on implementation of rural policy in Italy

The management system

In the previous paragraph, we highlighted how the process of devolution to regional authorities lead to a regional management of programmes for rural areas and, in Italy, this circumstance led to a big number of plans and programmes. In this context, the first and main consideration to be made is on the *sustainability of such programming system*. In fact, the high fragmentation of rural policy highlighted several weakness for the Italian programming system, in terms of:

- national co-ordination. In Italy, the Agricultural and Forestry Policies Ministry (MiPAF) is not a Managing Authority (does not have expenditure responsibility), but has a co-ordination responsibility of all rural programmes and obviously represents Italian Regions within the STAR Committee. It is evident the difficulty of co-ordinating 21 Administrations. This difficulty is even greater if we consider the number of programmes through which RD policy are delivered (besides RDPs

there are 7 Objective 1 ROPs and the 21 Leader + Programmes). Furthermore, in Objective 1 MiPAF is the Reference Authority for rural development interventions, co-ordinating sectorial administrative bodies, which are in turn co-ordinated, at regional level, by the administrative bodies in charge for the Managing of the programme. It should be noted that the sectorial offices have a low power in the decision making process, while the main decision concerning the programme are made by the Managing Authority¹. Finally, in the context of RDPs we have 5 different Paying Agencies, 4 operating at regional level (Emilia Romagna, Veneto, Tuscany, Lombardia) and the fifth (AGEA) operating at national level. Such arrangement implies a big deal of co-ordination for what concerns the managing of financial flows between the central and regional paying authorities from one side and the Agricultural Ministry from the other.

- EC co-ordination. As for the Italian Ministry, the great number of programmes implies greater difficulties for the EC offices in their co-ordination activities, involving, as an example, continuous consultations with the different managing Authorities and the frequent participation to regional Monitoring Committee.
- regional negotiation capacity. The experience of negotiation for the programme approval and the analysis of several Member State programmes highlighted the weakness of regional negotiation power. At this regard we compared the content of several programmes, approved within different Member states. From this comparison emerged how, where there was the possibility of a flexible interpretation of community regulations, often in the case of Italian regional programmes, because of the lack of negotiation capacity, prevailed the more restrictive interpretation of the rules. This circumstance appear to be more frequent in the case of innovative measures (i.e. those for the economic diversification of rural areas).
- integration between different programmes. The lack of integration is evident in the context of Objective 1 programmes, where would be crucial a greater integration between ROPs and RDPs; nevertheless the different managing rules

¹ Usually, in objective Regions this does not coincide with the office in charge for the implementation of RD policies.

governing the two categories of programmes made not possible such integration. We also observed a lack of integration between RDPs and Single Programming Document in Objective 2, in particular in the context of interventions directed to declining rural areas. We believe that the experience of LEADER + can provide positive examples of integration between different measures and interventions, which might apply also to the managing of rural development measures at regional level.

The second point is the so called problem of *Efficiency vs. Effectiveness of RD measures*; in fact many activities carried out in the first period of programmes implementation, showed an overstated attention to the speed of payments. This circumstance, in our opinion, constrains the overall effectiveness of the programmes. In Italy in the first half of the programming period the implementation focused mainly on fast spending measures (such as direct aid and measures contemplating a “premium” for “well behaving” farmers), projects (such as coherent projects, which are those project financed by national schemes and consistent with community rules, and executive projects) and semiautomatic selection procedures (such as “open” selection procedures, simplified modalities to access to aid). These practices were aimed to ensure more the fulfilment of spending objectives than the achievement of the outcomes, results and impacts defined by the programme strategy, through measure integration and increased attention to the quality of the projects selected.

The third point regards the *organisational changes* we observed within the Managing Authorities. In Italy a positive externality of structural policies implementation can be identified in the effect of institutional building experienced by the public administration involved. At this regard it should be highlighted the positive role played by Community Support Framework in objective 1 Regions, in terms of definition and adoption of common rules, thanks to the introduction of community and national award mechanisms².

² In the Italian CSF for objective 1 Regions to enhance the quality of programming and their managing was introduced, besides the Community performance reserve (4%), a national reserve (6%) awarded not only on the base of the criteria stated by Reg. 1260/99 but also on the following additional criteria: institutional capacity building, integration, concentration (Ministry of Economy, 2000).

Generally speaking, with reference to both RDPs and ROPs, we observed in the great part of regional administration the following improvement:

- a greater awareness of the importance to adopt more efficient selection procedures, contemplating the involvement of local administration in the selection of project (Tuscany, Emilia Romagna, Campania), the adoption of ad hoc software and informative systems (Puglia) and the adoption of selection procedures with open terms (Campania);
- a greater awareness of the importance of the role of monitoring and evaluation inside the programming cycle. At this regard it should be recalled the set-up of a national monitoring system at project level (Monit 2000), contemplating financial, procedural and physical indicators, the start-up of a National Evaluation System in objective 1 with the main objective of improving the evaluation capacity of regional administrations (Tavistok Institute, 2003), and the planned creation of a National Evaluation System for Rural Development Programmes.
- An increased transparency in the use of public resources and a greater involvement of stakeholders. In this direction goes the experience of several Managing Authorities of RDPs, which besides Monitoring committee (not mandatory within reg. 1257/99) activated additional Committees, with Consultation and/or Co-ordination role, composed by economic and social partners and local institution (Tuscany, Marche, Emilia Romagna, Sardinia, Puglia).

Summing up, even if a lot have been done in terms of organisational changes, we believe that further efforts are needed to improve programmes implementation in Italy.

Furthermore, in relation to the difficulties regarding spending involving the more strategic and innovative measures in favour of rural development and the environment, we think that would be important to develop specific actions in the interest of better information and more “animation” at the territorial level.

The implementation of programmes

This section, drawing among the other element on the fruit of a first survey³ of the mid term evaluation reports of the RDPs and Objective 1 ROPs, synthesises the principal recommendations and conclusions on the implementation of rural development measures in Italy. Tables 1 and 2 provide an overview by Region of the principal recommendations furnished by the independent evaluators.

During the first half of the actual programming period, as already underlined, was registered in Italy a differential speed in the implementation of specific groups of measures. The traditional structural aid to farmers and the former accompanying measures behaved like fast spending measures, while the expenditure on the incentive devoted to the diversification of rural areas and the provision of services for rural economy and population lagged behind. Outside Objective 1 regions the inclusion of all the different measure in one comprehensive programme allowed great flexibility and generally the respect of the expenditure time frame. We believe though that for the sake of quality of spending it should be avoided to put too much emphasis on “fast spending” measures trying to pay more attention to the effectiveness of programmes in terms of:

- the competitiveness of agri-food sector
- the quality of agri-food production
- the development of rural areas
- the agri-environment and less favoured areas

To this end would be important to look at the differentiated contribution that the different measures proposed may play to implement a given strategy. As an example to promote the effectiveness of rural policy in terms of food quality it is crucial

³ It is necessary to highlight the fact that the Ministry of Agricultural and Forestry Policies, which at the national level is responsible for activities pertaining to the co-ordination and examination of themes relating to agriculture and rural development, has deemed strategic the reading of the Evaluation Reports and the identification therein of the principal conclusions and recommendations for guiding the re-programming of the RDPs and ROPs. To that end, the results reviewed here have been used within the framework of:

- the National Monitoring Committee for Rural Development Plans;
- the Agriculture and Rural Development Group, a working group within the framework of the Monitoring Committee for the Objective 1 CSF

utilise all the available tools in an integrated manner by defining common objectives for the following interventions:

- investments in farm (measure *a*) and in the processing and marketing of agricultural products (measure *g*) need to be better finalised towards quality production and the recognition of new food quality schemes,
- support to the creation of food quality schemes (measure *m*),
- support granted to farmers who participate on a voluntary basis in Community or national food quality schemes (measure *z*),
- support granted for activities intended to inform consumers and to promote agricultural products (measure *aa*);
- marketing of quality agricultural products (measure *m*);
- intervention aimed at the promotion of rural areas and their linkage with quality product (microfiliera) (art.33 measures);
- training on issues related to quality production (measure *c*).
- agro-environment measures, for instance the support granted to organic farming should be complemented through investment aimed at the marketing of such products.

Furthermore, to improve effectiveness of rural development policy, would be necessary to revise the content of measures by changing the definition of admissible intervention, trying to provide an increased incentive to innovative measures. Also it is relevant to define selection criteria aimed at encouraging the concentration of the aid at territorial level, on given filiere or on environmental objectives, and more generally to improve the capacity of measures to reach their objectives.

Another element that we believe can have a big influence on effectiveness of programmes is the integration of the different policy instruments (RDPs/ROPs/Leader+/Ob. 2 DOCUP) and the extent to which the inflow of regional funds is sufficient to ensure a critical mass of resources. To improve integration between different programmes would also be important to introduce administrative procedures capable of fostering a better functional link among measures proposed in different spheres.

4. Conclusions

The available evidence from implementation of rural development measures in Italy suggests the opportunity to introduce new programming rules in the realm of Structural Funds and rural development policies.

To this end the Conference of Salzburg introduced important changes for the next programming period regarding the definition of applicability, programming and implementation procedures and delivery mechanism of EU rural development policy. From this stand point the main innovation is that its delivery shall be based on a single programming, financing and control system and on a single Fund. That is, rural development will be delivered, out of the cohesion policies, through ad hoc regional and/or national programmes.

This evolution, implying a substantial cutting off in the number of programmes, represents an important simplification in terms of programming in the Italian case and an important opportunity to integrate coherently in one comprehensive framework all the different Rural Development instruments. This way will be possible to have RD programmes governed by common rules, overcoming the actual situation in which there are different rules for EAGGF Guarantee and Guidance section.

Nevertheless the contribution of RD policies to cohesion policies objectives remains crucial. Therefore, to ensure the effectiveness of community territorial policies, it is important to identify adequate mechanism to enhance the integration among regional (ERDF and ESF) and rural development measures (EAGGF). To this end, in view of the future arrangements (the presence of separate programmes), it is necessary to have common rules for all the different development Funds, necessary condition for integrating different intervention at territorial level.

Furthermore we believe that the availability of common rules has important organisational implications for the regional managing authorities in terms of learning process and simplification, allowing an increased flexibility and facilitating, through the building of a common language, the exchange of experience between different officers working in different administrative bodies.

At National level it is not yet clear which will be the future arrangement of RD programming. Nevertheless in our opinion a possible solution would be the introduction of a National Programme with its own financial resources and strategies, containing all the necessary element to issue the EU approval Decision. National programming, built in partnership with Regional administrations, shall contain the general framework on the base of which each Region will define its own programming, approved by regional monitoring committee (without EU Decision) following the experience of Programme Complement.

Such solution from one side would guarantee regional autonomy, from the other will allow the adoption of national common rules (procedural and organisational), following the experience of CSF in Objective 1 regions, and the improvement in terms of national and community co-ordination, in line with the opportunity of strengthening subsidiarity.

Another point to be made regards the great emphasis given, in the ongoing debate on future functioning rules of RD policies, to financial mechanisms (n+2 *versus* EAGGF Guarantee section rules) and the attempt to assess which one is the more effective (for the European Commission) and the less impacting for Regional administrations. Nevertheless both mechanisms work mainly in the direction of accelerating spending. We believe instead that would be important to give more emphasis to the introduction/strengthening of “award mechanism” (not only performance reserve⁴), capable, as the Italian experience has proved:

- of accelerating spending;
- of improving quality of spending;
- of increasing institutional capacity building inside regional administrations.

Concerning the effectiveness of programmes strategies would be necessary to improve integration/concentration of interventions at level of:

- filiere (i.e. Filiere Integrated Project in Calabria OP) ;
- groups of measures aimed at the same objective (i.e. measures for quality);

⁴ See art 44 Reg. 1260/99.

- rural areas (i.e. Leader +; Territorial Integrated Project in ob.1 regions).

To this end is important to define new (or improve existing) ad hoc implementation procedures.

Furthermore, there are other aspects related to two specific measures of RDPs: Less Favoured Areas (LFA) and Agri-environment measures.

In the first case there is a need to better modulation of “compensatory allowances” and re-define LFA classification and zoning in order to improve the measure concentration in more needing areas.

Also, concerning Agri-environment measures, we identify the need to improve concentration and to differentiate premium according to type of action and local specificity. Finally we believe that the effectiveness of this measure might be greatly increased by improving integration with other measures. As an example action aimed at organic farming need to be complemented by adequate structural investments at farm level as well as by investments aimed at the marketing of such products.

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Table 1: Principal Recommendations by Independent Evaluators of RDPs

	Recommendations: Management System				Recommendations: Re-programming										
	Information and activation	Monitoring and information systems	Streamlining implementation procedures	Organisation	Financial revision	MTR measures	State Aid	RDP integration with other measures (ROP, State aid, etc.)	Integration and/or concentration			Improvement content of measures		Increased attention to environmental issues	Increased attention to equal opportunity
									Territory	Agri-environment and Less Favoured Areas	Filière	Selection criteria	Definition of admissible measures		
Piemonte															
Valle d'Aosta	x	x		x		x	x (-)		x		x				
Lombardia	x	x	x	x					x			x			
A.P. Bolzano															
A.P. Trento					x (+RD and m)										
Veneto															
Friuli Venezia Giulia		x	x	x	x (+a and c)	x		x	x	x	x	x	x (b, c, m)		
Liguria	x	x								(LFA)		x	x		x
Emilia Romagna		x						x	x	x (LFA)		x			
Tuscany	x								x	x					
Umbria		x	x						x			x			
Marche		x	x				x (+)		x						
Lazio		x	x		x (-RD)								x (RD)		
Abruzzo	x	x	x	x									x (b and c)	x	x
Molise		x		x											
Campania		x		x				x							
Calabria															
Sicily			x	x			x (+)	x		x (+LFA)				x	
Sardinia								x							

Legend:

MTR – Mid-Term Review

RD – Rural Development

LFA – Less Favoured Areas

a – Investments in farms

b – Start-up assistance for young farmers

c – Training

m – Marketing of quality agricultural products

+ / - – Increase / Decrease in financial allocation

Table 2: Principal Recommendations by Independent Evaluators of ROPs

	Recommendations: Management System				Recommendations: Re-programming									
	Information and activation	Monitoring and information systems	Streamlining implementation procedures	Organisation	Financial revision	MTR measures	RDP/ROP integration with other measures (ROP/RDP, RLP, State aid, etc.)	Integration and/or concentration			Improvement content of measures		Increased attention to environmental issues	Increased attention to equal opportunity
								Territory	ITP	Filière	Selection criteria	Definition of admissible measures		
Puglia	x							x			x		x	x
Basilicata			x		x (- v)		x		x	x		x		
Molise		x		x			x			x		x (s, p)		
Campania							x	x						x
Calabria		x		x	x				x	x			x	x
Sicily				x		x	x	x		x	x		x	x
Sardinia	x		x		x	x	x	x	x		x (p, n, b)	x (n, s)	x	x

Legend:

MTR – Mid-Term Review

ITP – Integrated Territorial Projects

RLP – Regional Leader+ Programme

b – start-up assistance for young farmers

p – diversifying agricultural activities

n – basic services for rural economy and population

s – encouraging tourist and craft activities

v – financial engineering

+ / - – Increase / Decrease in financial allocation