

Less and less work in agriculture; fall of 1.7% for EU-15 in 1998

Statistics in focus

AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES

THEME 5 – 14/1999

AGRICULTURE

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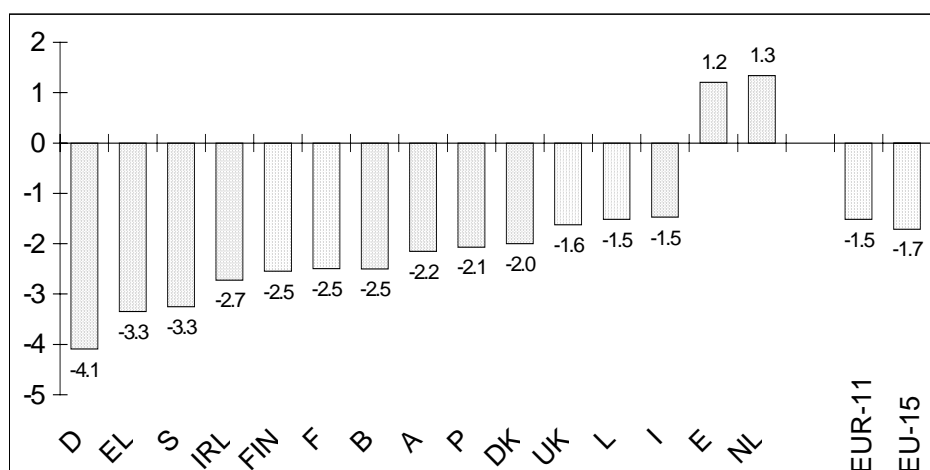
The amount of work within the EU's agricultural sector continued to decline in 1998 with an estimated loss of the equivalent of about 115 000 full-time workers (a fall of 1.7%). As a result, the share of agricultural employment in total employment in the EU will almost certainly have fallen from the figure of 4.6% recorded for 1997.

The estimated decline in total agricultural labour for 1998 was comprised of an equivalent loss of some 130 000 full-time family workers but a small rise in the volume of non-family labour. Although family labour still predominates (some 75% of the total volume), the latest results for 1998 seem to confirm a slow underlying structural shift towards hired labour.

Whilst the figures for 1998 also confirm the long-running downward trend in the volume of total agricultural labour, the rate of decline slowed for the fifth consecutive year (down from a rate of nearly -5% in 1992 and 1993). Despite the further reduction in agricultural labour, the amount of agricultural output in 1998 increased (an estimated 1.5% in volume terms), thereby reflecting a further improvement in the "partial" productivity of labour.

The developments in the agricultural labour input figures of the European Union as a whole (EU-15) are largely influenced by those in Italy, Spain and France, the three countries accounting for over half (54% in 1997) of all agricultural labour in the EU. Bearing this in mind, there were considerable differences in the rates of change in the volume of total agricultural labour in 1998 between the Member States. There were declines in thirteen of the Member States, the rate of -4.1% in Germany being the strongest, but increases in both Spain (+1.2) and the Netherlands (+1.3%).

Figure 1: The rate of change (%) in the volume of total agricultural labour, 1998



Source: Agricultural labour input statistics, COSA domain, NewCRONOS, Eurostat



General purpose of data on the volume of agricultural labour

The main purpose of calculating agricultural labour input statistics is to express trends in and levels of agricultural branch income in relation to the trends in agricultural labour input. This need stems from one of the objectives of the Common Agricultural Policy (Article 39, point 1b on the CAP within the Treaty of Rome), which is "thus to ensure a fair standard of living for the agricultural community, in particular by increasing the individual earnings of persons engaged in agriculture".

However, with the considerable degree of part-time work in agriculture, analysis of income trends and income levels on the basis of the number of persons engaged in agriculture is less precise than basing it on the volume of work carried out (expressed in Annual Work Units (AWUs)) by those engaged in agricultural production. For the effective analysis of trends in both income and labour productivity in agriculture, Eurostat therefore regards statistical records of agricultural labour input as extremely important.

Considerable restructuring

During the period 1979-1998, the volume of total labour in agriculture for the present Member States of the European Union as a whole (EU-15) decreased considerably and persistently. At the start of the review period, when Germany comprised 11 Länder, this aggregate volume of total labour for EU-15 was an estimated 12.4 million AWUs. The level fell to an estimated 6.7 million AWUs in 1998, by which time Germany referred to 16 Länder.

The reasons for this steady decline in the volume of

agricultural labour can be linked to both push and pull factors. On the one hand, the number of farms has declined sharply over the years leading to the loss of agricultural labour, and technological changes have seen the substitution of manual labour with machinery. On the other, there may have been relatively brighter economic prospects for the agricultural workforce in other sectors of the economy as personal expectations, environments and requirements have changed.

Table 1: Breakdown of agricultural labour

	EU-15	EUR-11	B	DK	D	EL	E	F	IRL	I	L	NL	A	P	FIN	S	UK
	<i>Total agricultural labour - (in thousands)</i>																
1979	12 443	10 512	120	151	1 053	978	2 025	1 868	313	3 242	10	257	267	1 211	270	147	532
1989	8 885	7 377	96	102	787	799	1 298	1 344	261	2 194	6	238	203	847	161	104	446
1998	6 729	5 608	74	78	633	581	1 044	981	200	1 639	5	227	132	550	123	80	383
% average annual rate 98/79			-2.5	-3.4		-2.7	-3.4	-3.3	-2.3	-3.5	-3.9	-0.6	-3.6	-4.1	-4.1	-3.1	-1.7
	<i>Family agricultural labour - (in thousands)</i>																
1979	9 716	8 147	109	119	936	874	1 545	1 577	278	2 095	9	207	243	1 035	263	112	313
1989	7 040	5 791	86	76	685	736	990	1 123	236	1 503	6	180	186	721	155	77	282
1998	5 023	4 152	64	55	449	505	724	767	183	1 123	4	153	114	455	116	63	248
% average annual rate 98/79			-2.8	-4.0		-2.8	-3.9	-3.7	-2.2	-3.2	-4.4	-1.6	-3.9	-4.2	-4.2	-3.0	-1.2
	<i>Non-family agricultural labour - (in thousands)</i>																
1979	2 727	2 365	11	31	117	104	481	290	35	1 146	1	50	23	176	7	35	220
1989	1 846	1 586	10	26	102	64	308	221	26	692	1	58	17	126	6	27	164
1998	1 706	1 455	10	22	184	76	320	214	17	516	1	75	18	95	6	18	135
% average annual rate 98/79			-0.4	-1.8		-1.7	-2.1	-1.6	-3.7	-4.1	1.3	2.2	-1.5	-3.2	-0.6	-3.5	-2.5

NB: Figures for the average rate of change during the period 1979-98 for EU-15 and Germany are not given in Table 1, because the change in territory for Germany in 1990 means that figures before 1990 are not comparable with those after.

Source: Agricultural labour input statistics, COSA domain, NewCRONOS, Eurostat

Although figures are not shown in the table, the average rate of decline in the volume of total labour in Germany accelerated after re-unification as a process of structural adjustment took place in the five new Länder; between 1979 and 1990 the average rate was -2.9% but since unification averaged -6.8%. The immediate effect of the five new Länder was to increase the rate of decline in EU-15 labour input from -3.6% in 1992 and -4.6% in 1993 to -5.0% in both years respectively. Since then, there have been slow-downs for the EU-15 and a number of key Member States which have resulted in an average EU-15 rate of decline of -3.4% per year for both the period before and after Germany's re-unification. It is noted that the persistent reduction in the volume of

total agricultural labour over the period for the EU was common to all of the Member States.

The latest figures for 1998 generally fit with this long-term trend, exceptions being in the case of Spain and the Netherlands. In both of these Member States, the effect of slightly lower volumes of family labour were outweighed by an increase in non-family labour (+5.0% and +4.6% respectively). In the case of Spain, an increase in the amount of hired labour was required for the bumper fresh vegetable, citrus fruit and olive oil harvests during the year. In the case of the Netherlands, the latest rise in the amount of hired labour is again linked to demands from the expanding horticultural sector.

Which farming sectors have shed the most labour?

At the level of the European Union as a whole, there is more work carried out in specialist dairy farming than any other farm type (13.4% of all agricultural labour in 1995, the last survey for which data are available from all the Member States). On average across the EU-15, there were the equivalent of 1.7 full-time workers per specialist dairy farm. This

average labour rate per dairy holding was above that of many other farm types, particularly specialist cereals, oilseed and protein crop farms (0.6 AWU per holding for EU-15) but less than specialist horticultural holdings (an average 2.3 AWU per holding for EU-15).

Table 2: Specialist farm type labour

	Cereals	General field cropping	Horticulture	Vineyards	Dairy cows	Sheep, goats and others	Mixed Cropping	Field crops, grazing livestock
<i>EU-9, Total labour force (1000 AWUs)</i>								
1975	346	760	288	462	1 230	324	766	985
1985	366	968	325	425	1 107	426	603	561
1995	396	459	288	329	687	347	334	321
<i>EU-9, Average AWU per holding</i>								
1975	0.9	1.2	2.3	:	1.6	1.0	1.2	1.6
1985	0.7	1.1	2.3	0.8	1.7	0.9	1.0	1.5
1995	0.7	1.1	2.7	0.9	1.7	0.7	1.0	1.5
<i>EU-15, Share of labour input in that of all holdings</i>								
1995	7.1	10.5	6.2	6.0	13.4	7.7	9.0	6.8

NB: a) EU-9 refers to B, DK, D, F, IRL, I, L, NL, UK; b) A change in classification definitions means that the group cereals and general field cropping are not exactly the same for 1995 as with the surveys carried out before then.

Source: Survey on the Structure of Agricultural Holdings, Eurofarm, NewCRONOS, Eurostat

Figures for the EU-9 (the nine Member States in 1975) over time show that the greatest losses in agricultural labour, both in absolute terms and in rates of decline, have been in dairy farming, mixed cropping and field crops - grazing livestock combined. In contrast, the amount of labour in horticulture was almost identical in 1995 to that twenty years previously (rises of almost

twenty thousand equivalent full-time workers in both the Netherlands and Italy balancing losses in France and the United Kingdom). Although there was a change in classification for cereal farms in 1995, the figures suggest that at the very least there has also been no net loss in the amount of agricultural labour within this sector between 1975 and 1995.

Greater flexibility of non-family labour?

It is often difficult to identify any one reason for the differences in the rates of change between the family and non-family series for a particular year. Nevertheless, there are some general factors regarding the flexibility of the non-family labour force that should be borne in mind. Demand for seasonal labour may vary considerably from year to year depending on the volume of production of certain perishable crop commodities like fruit, grapes and vegetables. Additionally, many farms, particularly small ones, are increasingly using hired labour on a contract basis for specialist tasks, rather than investing in new technological or replacement machinery, which may or may not involve (re)training. Also, there has been a structural change

in the family labour base as some older farmers have been encouraged into (early) retirement (this helps explain the accelerated rate of decline around 1994 in countries like France, Italy and Portugal) and as some family members of a holder have drifted out of agriculture, particularly wives and daughters to paid employment in other sectors of the economy. Whilst farms have been retained as a family concern much of the family labour may have been substituted with hired labour. It must also be noted that there are an increasing number of farms with a legal basis. Such farms, often with directors at the helm, cannot be classified as family farms and the labour input employed by the farm is therefore classified as non-family labour input.

Table 3: Rates of change in agricultural labour input in the EU for 1998/97 and relative shares in 1998

	Share of EU-15 total labour input	Rate of change in total labour input	Rate of change in family labour input	Rate of change in non-family labour input	Share of family in total labour input
EU-15	100.0	-1.7	-2.5	0.8	75
EUR-11	83.3	-1.5	-2.3	1.1	74
B	1.1	-2.5	-2.5	-2.5	86
DK	1.2	-2.0	-2.0	-2.0	71
D	9.4	-4.1	-5.5	-0.5	71
EL	8.6	-3.3	-4.1	1.9	87
E	15.5	1.2	-0.4	5.0	69
F	14.6	-2.5	-3.3	0.5	78
IRL	3.0	-2.7	-2.8	-1.7	91
I	24.3	-1.5	-2.0	-0.3	69
L	0.1	-1.5	-2.2	2.6	85
NL	3.4	1.3	-0.2	4.6	67
A	2.0	-2.2	-2.6	0.6	87
P	8.2	-2.1	-2.5	0.0	83
FIN	1.8	-2.5	-3.1	0.0	94
S	1.2	-3.3	-1.7	-8.3	78
UK	5.7	-1.6	-1.5	-1.9	65

Source: *Agricultural labour input statistics, COSA domain, NewCRONOS, Eurostat*

A slim majority of Member States estimated that the volume of non-family labour in 1998 was either higher or the same as that in 1997 (see Table 3). Among the other Member States there were a number where the rate of decline was less steep or the same as that for family labour input. The latest development lends weight to the argument that there

is a gradual shift in the makeup of farm workers with a move away from the old-style family farm. However, the fragile nature of the estimates for non-family labour input should perhaps be stressed; the absolute numbers are relatively small and recording annual fluctuations in these levels are particularly difficult.

Less labour but improvements in productivity?

Reasons have already been given for why there has been a sharp decline in the volume of agricultural labour in the European Union over the last twenty-five years covered by date. Nevertheless, during the same period of time, the volume of final agricultural output has increased substantially. It can therefore be concluded that the combined productivity of land, labour and capital in the agricultural branch of the economy has increased. Ongoing technical developments in agriculture have resulted in considerable productivity increases which have themselves led the way to ever more intensive farming methods, whilst agricultural labour has been freed up to work in other sectors of the economy for better resource allocation.

"Partial" productivity indicators allocate all increases to a single factor input (in this case labour). Factor substitution and changes in quality and volumes of other factor inputs (land and capital) as well as advances in knowledge, which can be significant in contributing to total productivity are not taken into account. With the strong demands on data availability that a total productivity measure would

entail, together with a complicated methodology, partial productivity measures are more commonly used, despite their limitations.

The partial productivity of agricultural labour is measured in two ways. Firstly, it is done according to the volume of output per man hour worked. As an AWU measures the volume of work carried out in agriculture on a full-time basis in the year, the first measure of partial productivity used here is that of the volume of final agricultural output per full-time labour equivalent. Secondly, it is calculated as the value of final output minus the value of input goods and services, adjusted for taxes and subsidies linked to production - called gross value added at factor cost - per AWU.

The table below shows how the index of the volume of final output, of gross value added at factor cost (GVAfc) - both taken from the Economic Accounts for Agriculture - and the volume of labour have changed since "1981" (a three-year average centred on 1980) and the resulting agricultural labour input partial productivity indicators.

Table 4: Changes (%) in the partial productivity of agricultural labour input between "1981" and "1997"

	Volume of final output	Real (deflated) GVAfc	Volume of agricultural labour input	Volume of final output per AWU	Real (deflated) GVAfc per AWU
EU-15	:	:	:	:	:
EUR-11	:	:	:	:	:
B	33.5	-29.3	-32.2	96.9	4.1
DK	25.8	-9.0	-41.5	114.6	54.4
D	:	:	:	:	:
EL	12.3	-20.4	-36.0	75.7	24.4
E	27.7	12.5	-40.2	113.3	88.2
F	23.4	-13.6	-43.1	116.8	51.6
IRL	35.2	20.0	-29.8	92.7	70.7
I	8.7	-28.1	-39.4	79.3	18.7
L	8.9	-32.9	-46.7	103.3	25.0
NL	27.5	6.6	-10.2	41.9	18.6
A	3.1	-20.2	-47.1	94.8	50.6
P	44.1*	-23.3*	-51.6	197.3*	58.1*
FIN	-7.1	-25.3	-49.9	85.4	48.9
S	-4.7	-44.1	-39.5	57.5	-7.7
UK	9.5	-21.6	-23.7	43.6	2.6

NB: The data presented for Portugal cover the mainland only in the period before 1986 and mainland Portugal together with Madeira and the Azores after 1986.

Source: Agricultural labour input statistics and economic Accounts for Agriculture, COSA domain, NewCRONOS, Eurostat

It must be borne in mind that the structures of agriculture in the Member States are different. Some types of agricultural production (orchard, vineyard and olive grove production) are more labour intensive than others. Additionally, some technological developments are not applicable or of varying applicability in Member States because of climatic, soil and topographical conditions. Finally, each Member State is starting from a different productivity base and rates of change may simply reflect changes relative to a low productivity level. Conversely, small changes may be based on high productivity levels. For these reasons it makes more sense to look at the rates of change between Member States rather than levels compared to an EU average.

The partial productivity indicator of final output volume per work unit suggests that there have been widespread and marked improvements during the review period. For most Member States there has been expanding agricultural output (the exceptions being for Finland and Sweden) at the same time as marked reductions in the volume of agricultural labour. Although direct comparisons between Member States should be treated with caution for the reservations expressed above, it can be concluded that the differences between the rates of productivity gain may be very substantial, especially in extreme cases (the Netherlands and Portugal).

As farmers retire or leave agriculture, the industry make-up is changing to that of a smaller number of bigger, often specialising farms, engaging a smaller amount of labour input per holding than predecessors. Remaining farms are also rationalising in the ways already alluded to.

Before reviewing the other partial productivity indicator, further reservations about comparisons between Member States should be mentioned. Subsidies come not only from the CAP but also from national programmes, some Member States apply a greater level of production-linked taxes than others (pollution taxes for example), Member States may be at different points in the agricultural business cycle, there have been differences in exchange rate movements, and not all the Member States were within the EU at the start of the review period.

Bearing these points in mind, the partial productivity indicator or the value of final output minus the value of input goods and services and then adjusted for taxes and subsidies linked to production per work unit, nevertheless, provides confirmation of widespread productivity improvements. It is calculated that for twelve of the Member States, there were clear improvements in this measure of the partial productivity of agricultural labour, with the greatest gains being on the Iberian peninsula. In contrast, the levels in Belgium and the United Kingdom were almost unchanged at both ends of the reference period and in Sweden there was a decline. In both Belgium and the United Kingdom, the ends of the reference period represented lows, some 17% less than their peaks in "1990" and in "1995" respectively. In Belgium, the origin of this recent decline is linked to the considerable real (deflated) price declines for the key cattle and pig sectors. In the case of the United Kingdom, the productivity deterioration since "1995" is explained by the two-fold impact of the BSE (Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy) crisis and associated export ban and an appreciating currency. In Sweden, the deterioration in this partial productivity indicator coincided with the 1990 reforms in national support policy for agriculture.

➤ ESSENTIAL INFORMATION – METHODOLOGICAL NOTES

AGRICULTURAL LABOUR INPUT STATISTICS

SOURCES

Agricultural labour input statistics are collated from the appropriate national authorities under a so-called "gentlemen's agreement". Member States calculate their data from a number of different sources, most often being combinations of Labour Force Survey data with Survey on the Structure of Agricultural Holdings data. Eurostat has, however, imposed a target methodological framework within which the data can be calculated.

REQUIREMENTS

The key requirements and methods used for meeting the objectives of Agricultural Labour Input (ALI) statistics (as mentioned under general purpose) are summarised here. They refer to a set of conditions that are necessary for the current concepts and methods in the Economic Accounts for Agriculture and particularly the current Agricultural Income Indicators. However, these conditions will be updated with effect for the 1999 data and include a change in classification and coverage. The current list of target criteria concern:

1. **The definition of work** - agricultural labour input should include all work actually performed in connection with the production of agricultural produce, including produce which is used (again) within the branch of agriculture.
2. **The unit of measurement** - agricultural labour input must be expressed in Annual Work Units (AWUs). The number of hours comprising an AWU should correspond to the number of hours actually worked in a full-time job within agriculture. "Full-time" means the minimum hours required by the national provisions governing contracts of employment. If these do not indicate the number of actual hours, 1 800 is to be taken as the minimum figure (225 working days of 8 hours per day). (In the period from 1979-1987, the figure was 2 200 hours). Days of leave and sickness do not count as working days.

3. No single agricultural worker can be counted as more than one AWU, despite the fact that the number of hours actually worked might be known to be higher than is usual for full-time agricultural employment. Therefore, **a maximum of 1 AWU is imposed** per worker, by way of constraint.
4. The number of hours worked by **a person should not be adjusted by a coefficient because of age or gender**.
5. In order to establish the correct level of the income indicators, the volume of agricultural labour input (the denominator) should correspond to that carried out in order to generate the agricultural income (the numerator) recorded for a particular year. **In this respect, agricultural labour input must be linked to the value of output, intermediate consumption and value added as recorded in the Economic Accounts for Agriculture (EAA).**

FURTHER READING

On methodology:

Agricultural Labour Input in the EU, 1973-1996 (ISBN 92-828-2848-4). Details are given of the target methodological framework and those actually applied by the Member States.

Associated:

Income from Agricultural Activity, 1998 (ISBN 92-828-6030-2). Detailed analysis and tables on the changes in income from agricultural activity per unit of labour for 1998 over 1997 and for the longer term between 1980 and 1998 for both the European Union as a whole and each Member State.

To be released:

Farm Structure 1995 Survey: Main results, around mid-June 1999.

Farm Structure Historical results, 1966/67 to 1995, around Autumn 1999.

Further information:

➤ Databases

NewCRONOS

Domain: COSA, EUROFARM

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Marleen COPERS for Survey on the Structure of Agricultural Holdings, e-mail: Marleen.Copers@eurostat.cec.be.

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