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Research Trip Spring 2007
Narrative Report

The CES grant was used to cover costs associated with conducting interviews for my doctoral dissertation. The interviews were conducted in London and Brussels and involved discussions with key decision-makers, as well as stakeholders and critics, involved in implementing, researching or reforming some aspect of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) of the European Union (EU). I interviewed staff of the Agricultural Commissioner and policy specialists and civil servants employed within the DG-VI (the General-Directorate for Agriculture and Rural Development). Among the DG-VI personnel, I spoke with persons working on issues pertaining to rural development, organic food production, and efforts to simplify the legal structures of the CAP. Outside of the EU institutions, I interviewed representatives from the major EU farm lobbies (COPA and CPE), as well as NGO's working with the Commission on some aspect of the policy, or engaged in a critique of the policy (Oxfam Solidarity, Oxfam International, Wervel, CSA, IEEP).

The interviews provided two distinct 'value added' elements to my research. First, the interviews provided me with the ability to collect the technical and contextual background on CAP reforms and programs that will be analyzed in my dissertation. Often, information such as what motivates a particular government program or how the program is carried out in detail, is not apparent by reading through official Commission documents. For example, the LEADER program is a well established program within the Agricultural and Rural Development DG. It provides money for rural development projects that provide a "grass-roots" plan for rural community regeneration. The way the program is funded and the requirements for funding are clearly detailed in Commission documents. Yet, the vertical and horizontal structures of the program (in other words, who answers to who) as well as the long-term strategic aims for this type of strategy of rural governance are not so clearly outlined. The semi-structured interview provided a way to ask such questions, in turn giving me a fuller understanding of the LEADER program.

Second, the interviews provided me the ability to "map" the predominate discourses surrounding the CAP. The CAP is a complex policy, with many dimensions such as environmental regulation, rural development and food safety that go beyond the market organization of commodities (the original emphasis of the CAP). As the competencies and problems associated with CAP reform have increased, so have the influence of outside civil society actors, such as NGOs working on environmental and developmental issues, and 'alterative' farm organizations who increasingly critique the CAP from an anti-liberalization and pro-small farmer perspective. In sum, there are now a myriad of actors that will shape the future of European agriculture: the European Commission, the national and European farm lobbies and various NGOs working in the areas of environmental sustainability and "food sovereignty". At a basic, yet extremely important level, these interviews allowed me to 'map out' the many discourses on agriculture and rural development in Europe. Understanding where these discourses diverge and overlap will be crucial for constructing hypotheses on how the CAP may be (re)designed in the future.