

[Reform of the Common Agricultural Policy](#) [1]

Written by [Tim Worstall](#) [2] | Sunday 21 September 2008



As a purely personal opinion reform of the Common Agricultural Policy should be achieved by burning the entire structure to the ground and ploughing the intellectual landscape that produced it with salt: the selling of the administering population into bondage would perhaps be a step too far in this age.

In the absence of a Cato to lead the mob with burning brands and pitchforks aloft I am left to consider less radical alternatives. Like [this one](#) [3] from the European Centre for International Political Economy. They open with two quite mindboggling points:

Alasdair Darling, the British Finance Minister, recently proposed to abolish tariffs and all other measures that keep EU agricultural prices above world market levels, as well as to end the direct payments that farmers receive irrespective of their output.

Good grief, almost makes me warm to the man, such an entirely sensible proposition. This is less sensible:

Michel Barnier, his French counterpart, even deems the CAP so effective that the policy should be exported to developing countries.

Just what the developing world needs, high food prices, a tax burden supportable only by the already rich and limits on what farmers may produce and how.

The basic outline of their proposal is that:

First, that all measures that distort market prices and production should be abolished. This includes production quotas, land set-asides, storage aids, export refunds, output payments, and area payments. Second, the Single Farm Payment (SFP), which provides income support to farmers independently of their current production decisions, should be phased out because it does not serve any societal need. Third, targeted subsidies that reward farmers for providing socially valued services that are not remunerated on the market, such as maintaining scenic landscapes, should be adapted. Many of these subsidies should be provided at the national or local level without or with little EU co-financing.

In a nutshell, that the Common Agricultural Policy should, as a policy, have almost nothing to do with agriculture and should not be common. Yes, I'd happily sign up to that, even in the absence of an oratorical firebrand whipping the mob along with cries of *CAP delenda est* for the end result would indeed be that *delenda** to all our benefit.

* *Yes, yes, I know, pig Latin of the most appalling kind*

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