16 March 2001, having examined their replies, it continued with the second phase of this consultation process by sending them a document dealing with teleworking, since the social partners expressed very considerable immediate interest in this topic. Indeed, they made it known that Community action was highly desirable in this area and was likely to provide added value.

It is true that the spread of the information technologies, accelerated by the development of the Internet, is leading to the development of this new type of work organisation, which cannot be ignored. However, while it undeniable that teleworking represents a factor of flexibility, the Commission considers that it is necessary to ensure that its development does not take place to the detriment of the protection of employees.

That is why the Commission believes that it is necessary to draw up guidelines governing the practice of teleworking without hampering its development. On the basis of the various existing practices, in order to adapt the working environment (especially the practices stemming from collective bargaining), as part of these consultations the Commission submitted to the social partners a list of general principles that should govern practice: voluntary basis, with right of return; guaranteed retention of employee status; guarantee of equal treatment; information to be given to teleworkers; payment of the costs by the employer; guarantee of the provision of suitable training; protection in the area of health and safety; working time; protection of private life and personal data; maintenance of contact with the enterprise; the collective rights of teleworkers and access to teleworking.

In these consultations, the Commission has invited the social partners to send it an opinion or a recommendation on the content of the planned proposal (in accordance with Article 138(3) of the EC Treaty) or to inform it of their wish to initiate the negotiation process on the basis of this proposal (Article 138(4) and Article 139 (ex Article 118b) of the EC Treaty). It is currently awaiting their replies. Moreover, as the Honourable Member points out, at sectoral level, certain employers' and workers' organisations have already adopted guidelines on the organisation of teleworking in their sectors.

(2001/C 318 E/128)

WRITTEN QUESTION P-0786/01
by Jonas Sjöstedt (GUE/NGL) to the Commission

(7 March 2001)

Subject: Research programme and the Agricultural Fund

Agriculture is vital to the survival of rural areas in northern Sweden, in terms of employment, the social environment and the landscape. The most northerly agriculture in the world is conducted in northern Scandinavia, under unique climatic conditions, and the need for regionally adapted R&D is correspondingly great. This R&D should be directed towards exploiting the opportunities offered by the climate while minimising the disadvantages. It should also seek to husband local resources used in current production to make it more sustainable, while at the same time developing alternative foodstuff and non-foodstuff production. This R&D will be an important regional policy instrument.

A comprehensive R&D programme to achieve this has been developed to cover all Objective 1 areas of northern Sweden. It includes applied research and a strategy for disseminating results. Three out of four county administrative boards have promised funding while the fourth is awaiting a decision in respect of Objective 1. The agricultural sector has decided to fund 20% of the cost. The Objective 1 administrative authorities are questioning the admissibility of support for such a programme under the rules governing the Agricultural and Regional Funds, maintaining that the Agricultural Fund is not allowed to support research. Does the Commission share the view put forward by the Objective 1 administrative authorities?
Council Regulation (EC) No 1260/1999 of 21 June 1999 (1) lays down the general provisions applicable to the operation of structural funds programmes, like the two Objective 1 programmes in Sweden. Four funds contribute to the Objective 1 programmes in Sweden: the European agriculture guidance and guarantee fund (EAGGF), the European regional development fund (ERDF), the European social fund (ESF) and the financial instrument for fisheries guidance (FIFG). Regarding the EAGGF, Council Regulation (EC) No 1257/1999 of 17 May 1999 on support for rural development from the European agricultural guidance and guarantee fund (EAGGF) and amending and repealing certain Regulations (2) governs support for rural development. Its article 37(3), second indent, excludes support for research projects from the scope of the Regulation. It is furthermore underlined (in Article 37(2)) the need to ensure the consistency with other Community policies. Consequently support to agriculture research projects as defined in Council Regulation (EC) No 1257/1999 Article 37(3) should not be searched for under EAGGF—Guidance section but rather under the Community research and technological development policy.

In particular, research on employment, social environment and landscape in rural areas are addressed within the section on new tools and models for the integrated and sustainable development of rural areas of key action 5 ‘Sustainable Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry’ of the Quality of Life Programme of the Fifth framework programme (1998-2002).


(2001/C 318 E/129) WRITTEN QUESTION E-0791/01
by John McCartin (PPE-DE) to the Commission
(13 March 2001)

Subject: French measures in the beef market

Is the Commission aware of a decision by the French government to take unilateral steps to subsidise beef farmers for the mad cow crisis? Does the Commission regard this decision as a threat to the common agricultural policy and have any steps been taken to reach agreement with the French authorities to ensure that moves towards re-nationalisation of the CAP are avoided?

Answer given by Mr Fischler on behalf of the Commission
(2 May 2001)

The Commission is aware of the French government’s intentions to put into place a national aids regime to compensate farmers directly affected by the bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) crisis. The French authorities have as a matter of fact notified to the Commission a State aids regime linked to the BSE crisis, as other Member States have also done. All notifications are being examined in the light of existing competition rules and only those aids which the Commission may consider to be compatible with article 87 (ex Article 92) of the EC Treaty will be authorised. To the extent that such aid will be authorised, the Commission would not consider it a threat to the common agricultural policy. On the other hand, any aid paid out without prior authorisation by the Commission would be illegal, and could pose a threat to the common agricultural policy.