



Riksrevisjonen
Office of the Auditor General of Norway

The Office of the Auditor General's investigation of goal achievement and control in agriculture

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Summary

Background and goals of the investigation

In addition to producing food, agriculture must also address social issues such as keeping our rural communities alive, biodiversity, the cultural landscape and long-term food safety. Agriculture receives approximately NOK 14 billion of public funds annually, and most of these appropriations are designed to advance the goals and guidelines that have been defined for agriculture.

The goal of the Office of the Auditor General's investigation was to assess the degree to which control and administration by the Ministry of Agriculture and Food contribute to an active, varied and attractive agriculture throughout Norway that produces food and works for the common good in line with the Storting's decisions and intentions.

Method

The lines of inquiry in the investigation were pursued through document reviews, gathering of statistical data, interviews, questionnaire surveys, meetings and written lists of questions. The investigation period was 1999-2009.

Results

The investigation shows that there are weaknesses in goal achievement for several of the goals the Storting has established for agriculture. While food production is in accordance with the defined goals, there are substantial challenges related to reaching the Storting's goal of maintaining an active and varied agriculture throughout the country. Goals for the protection of land and landscape resources and various environmental considerations have only been achieved to varying degrees. Agriculture in parts of Western Norway, Northern Norway, the Agder counties and Telemark is particularly exposed – for example in terms of farm closures, the farmers' belief in the future, the share of leased land and unoccupied agricultural properties.

The goal of halving the annual reallocation of valuable agricultural land

by 2010 has not yet been reached, and the quality of the agricultural land is deteriorating. Agricultural advancements also make it difficult to protect various aspects of the cultural landscape. There are shortcomings in goal achievement related to reducing soil and water pollution from agriculture, and there is a need to strengthen the effort to comply with our international commitments in this area. As of today, we are also far from reaching the goal of 15% ecological production by 2015, and the deadline for reaching this goal has once again been postponed – this time to 2020.

The investigation shows that, only to a limited degree, has the Ministry of Agriculture and Food elaborated on the Storting's overall policy goals for the agriculture and food sector by drawing up more specific, defined and measurable goals. This has consequences for goal achievement, result requirements and result indicators for underlying activities, and for the reporting of results. The majority of the players in the public policy system at the county and municipal level believe that conflicting agricultural policy goals make it difficult to follow up the national agricultural policy, and that there is a need for clearer signals for several of the goals. The Office of the Auditor General believes the Ministry must do more to describe the priorities and considerations on which the current administration is based – both the goals that are passed on to lower-level administrative entities and the reporting requirements to the Storting.

A significant portion of the existing grant schemes must contribute to realising environmental goals and goals for outlying areas. There is a need for better follow-up of established initiatives in order to set targets for the large grants. There is also an increasing need for agricultural grants to be designed and administered on the basis of updated knowledge of where the discrepancies between goals and results are the largest.

The investigation shows that there is still a need to simplify the policy instruments directed towards agriculture. The existing public policy system is comprehensive and complex. The consequences of this include a risk of incorrect or inconsistent case administration and the provision of inadequate guidance and information about funds to potential applicants. There is also a risk that frequently changing policy instruments will weaken the farmers' ability to plan long-term.

A significant amount of public funds is appropriated by agriculture every year, and optimum control of these funds is important. The investigation shows that under the current control system, there is a risk that errors remain undiscovered. The Office of the Auditor General holds the view that there is a need to further develop a more risk-based control system.

Ministry/ministries

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- Ministry of Agriculture and Food
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