

2014-18

SEASONALITY IN THE AGRICULTURAL, HALIEUTIC AND AGRO-FOOD SECTORS: A LITTLE-KNOWN REALITY OF NEVERTHELESS MAJOR SIGNIFICANCE

Agriculture, aquaculture and fishing, along with certain artisan and industrial activities in the food industry, are, by their very nature, linked to the rhythm of the seasons and to the natural elements, meteorological factors in particular, that determine both the quantities and timing of production.

Seasonality nevertheless incorporates a number of factors which, overtime, have undergone various changes. With this in mind, natural seasonality results in changes in production, with periods varying from one region to another, depending on both the technical and varietal choices made and a number of economic constraints. At the same time, it tends to ease gradually at the transformation stage, notably due to scientific progress and changes in preservation technologies, although certain activities in the agri-food industry continue to have to deal with seasonal peaks. There is, of course, another side to seasonality, this time related to consumption and based on traditional behaviours during holiday periods (chocolates, foie gras, oysters, etc.) or reflecting weather conditions (ice cream during the summer months, stews in winter, etc.).

Nevertheless, there would appear to be little awareness of this phenomenon and the apparently complex consequences thereof in the absence of any real legal definition of seasonality and therefore of aggregate statistical data, making it impossible to measure its extent. The economic and social issues where companies, employees and regions are concerned are, however, rather significant,

which is why the ESEC has chosen to look at this matter by limiting the field of study to the agricultural, halieutic and food sectors, which, unlike the tourism sector, which is also heavily dependent on the rhythm of the seasons, have not been covered in any specific recent works.

Based on an earlier report outlining an unprecedented global approach with regards to activities affected by seasonality in its various forms where both businesses and employees are concerned, the report highlights a series of recommendations aimed at reducing the negative impact of seasonality, notably by encouraging the diversification and evening out of their activity levels over time with regards to businesses and at the same encouraging the sustainability of jobs and the combination of several jobs where employees are concerned. It endeavours to take into account the diversity of the potential strategies a business might consider, depending on their situation, and disparities in the expectations of seasonal employees. Finally, it draws inspiration from a number of interesting regional initiatives highlighted through the hearings conducted and that are still, nevertheless, all too often isolated.

«Seasonality sets the pace of life for many workers, companies and regions in our country and the characteristics of seasonality require appropriate responses»



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KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

➤ Securing the economic activity of highly-seasonal businesses

- Encouraging the extension of production periods whilst taking energy and environmental issues into account
- Extending sales periods through the development of export activity
- Supporting the diversification of crops and activities within both businesses and regions, notably by means of engineering support systems
- Increasing contractualisation within the sectors concerned
- Removing any obstacles to the development of cross-sectoral employer associations
- Inviting banking organisations to develop appropriate funding tools at national level

➤ Raising awareness among consumers

- Providing more visible information for the general public on natural production periods
- Encouraging the consumption of local seasonal products, including in the group catering sector, notably by prioritising short, local distribution channels

➤ Encouraging recruitment

- Improving the information provided for both employees and businesses by drawing on past experiences
- Developing coordination between the players involved in the employment sector in a given region with the aim of better coordinating supply and demand
- Improving the accommodation and integration of seasonal workers within businesses

➤ Building loyalty among seasonal workers and extending their periods of employment

- Using the regional GPEC human resources planning system as a tool that will enable greater consideration to be given to the characteristics of and changes in seasonality
- Encouraging the combination of several jobs and creating seasonal loops
- Recognising the qualifications of seasonal employees

➤ Enabling seasonal employees to receive training and providing companies with the necessary skills

- Making it easier for seasonal workers to exercise their rights to training and encouraging dual qualification
- Establishing coordination between OPCAs (accredited training fund collecting bodies) to fund seasonal worker training initiatives
- Adapting training programmes and hours to reflect the rhythm and schedule of seasonal activity

➤ Improving the employment and living conditions of seasonal workers

- Guaranteeing better collective social protection coverage for seasonal workers, notably through the introduction of a pivotal fund
- Adapting professional risk prevention measures to the specificities of seasonal work
- Facilitating access to transport, accommodation and family services
- Examining legal and regulatory developments aimed at reducing the uncertainty associated with seasonal contracts

➤ Ensuring better management

- Establishing a legal definition of seasonality that takes into account its various facets
- Compiling reliable and consistent statistical data
- Strengthening coordination between the State, the regions and the territories and all of the parties concerned
- Encouraging the widespread implementation of regional initiatives and innovative business strategies
- Clarifying and standardising the duties of the Maisons des Saisonniers seasonal worker centres