OECD EXAMINES RURAL POLICY

Vienna, 13th-15th October 1992

The Group of the Council on Rural Development will meet in Vienna (Austria) from 13th to 15th October, at the invitation of the Austrian authorities, in particular the Federal Chancellery and the Ministry of Agriculture. Trends in rural policies in Member countries, as well as a report on socio-economic rural indicators, will be discussed during this meeting. A study trip in the Waldviertel region (Lower Austria), organised jointly by the Federal and Regional authorities, is also on the agenda.

In OECD Member countries, one third of the population is rural while nine-tenths of the territory is rural. The rural world is in a period of major transformation. Development is rapidly changing some rural areas, while in many others the population is decreasing. Agricultural policies -- the traditional government tool for dealing with rural problems -- affect an ever shrinking portion of rural people and economies, and come at higher and higher costs. Furthermore, many OECD Member countries believe that the countryside plays an increasingly important part in achieving an overall urban-rural balance.

The rural development objectives in OECD’s two-year programme, undertaken at the request of Economic Affairs and Agriculture Ministers, are both economic and social. The aim is to enhance the competitiveness of rural areas so that they can contribute appropriately to national economic development and provide opportunities for rural citizens to enjoy standards of living comparable to national norms. The objectives also include enhancing key elements of national heritage -- environmental and cultural -- in rural areas.

In the economic sphere, many rural areas still rely heavily on the primary sectors, especially agriculture, for income and jobs. However, agricultural employment has been contracting for decades. The new jobs that have prevented or slowed the rate of rural depopulation are in other sectors, such as consumer services, construction and recreation. This trend will continue no matter which agricultural policy reforms are adopted. The central
challenge for rural policy is promoting a national balance of economic opportunities and social conditions, without destroying important aspects of the rural heritage or suppressing market incentives that lead to improved national economic performance.

A press conference will be held after the opening addresses by Mrs. Brigitte Ederer, Minister of State for European Integration and Development Co-operation, representing the Federal Chancellor Mr. Franz Vranitzky, Mr. Franz Fischler, Minister of Agriculture and OECD Deputy Secretary General Mr. Robert Cornell. The press conference will take place at 10.30 a.m. on 13th October at the Federal Chancellery, Minoritenplatz 9, 1014 Vienna.

Journalists wishing to obtain further information should contact Mr. Christian Huillet, Deputy Head of the OECD Rural Development Programme, Paris, (tel. 33 1 45 24 90 78; fax. 33 1 45 24 16 68) or Mr. Alfred Kohlbacher, Senior Counsellor, The Austrian Federal Chancellery, Vienna (tel. 43 222 531 15 29 09; fax. 43 222 531 15 29 35).