

Press release

## EMB attends audience in Vatican today

### *Pope Francis supports milk producers in their struggle for a fair and sustainable agricultural system*

(Rome, 27 January 2016) European dairy farmers have sought out an unusual patron in the search for solidarity for the difficult situation they are facing. Today, 140 members of the European Milk Board attended an audience with the Pope in the Vatican and asked for his support. Dairy farmers from all over Europe - from France to Lithuania - made their way to Rome, seeking blessings for themselves, their families and the state of their profession.

"The Pope speaks to us dairy farmers from the heart," said Romuald Schaber, President of the European Milk Board. "Humility, sustainability and respect for what man receives from nature are virtues that guide our lives. Pope Francis's blessing means a lot to us and has strengthened us in our efforts."

"Open to me the gates of righteousness" said Pope Francis at the beginning of the Holy Year in early December, opening the Holy Door of St. Peter's Basilica, which had remained bolted for 15 years. Milk producers are also calling for righteousness. They are the first and weakest link in the food production chain and have had to fight for their financial survival for a long time now, in the face of extremely low milk prices. Prices for producers in Europe have fallen by 30-40% due to politically condoned overproduction. In many countries, the price is as low as 25 cents per litre, while production costs are over 40 cents. Traders and dairy companies, on the other hand, are making hefty profits.

Dairy farmers in Europe are currently facing an extremely difficult situation. The shortcomings plaguing the dairy market are being ignored by policy-makers. "The [Market Responsibility Programme \(MRP\)](#) developed by the EMB, which addresses overproduction, must finally be implemented by EU policy-makers. Only then can milk producers make a living from their work," said Sieta van Keimpema, EMB Vice-President.

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The Pope has repeatedly deemed the current economic system unfair and strongly criticised neoliberalism. EU policies with their overproduction and export focus are currently destroying peasant dairy farms in Europe and in developing countries. European companies are standing by to enter local dairy markets in developing countries and end up supressing local milk production sooner or later. This leads to poverty - an issue that is close to the Pope's heart.

Roberto Cavaliere from APL Italy was very impressed after speaking with the head of the Catholic Church: "Pope Francis takes a firm stand against abuse. We must also continue this uncomfortable struggle with the same fighting spirit. We need better underlying conditions for the dairy market, so that we and our families can have a future and sustainable agriculture becomes possible."

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