

Dear dairy farmers, dear interested parties,

2008/2009 - 2019!

More than ten years ago, dairy farmers organised major milk strikes, as part of their Europe-wide fight for fair milk prices. In 2008 and 2009, they courageously and, at the same time with a heavy heart, poured away the contents of their milk tanks to clearly show the whole world how they were being grossly underpaid for their milk. Now, in September 2019, I would like to invite everyone to celebrate these 10 and 11 years of milk strikes and to felicitate the courage and strength of the participating dairy farmers. Actions will be staged in France and Belgium, among other countries. That historic moment was a real turning point for us, where we spoke out loud and clear for the survival of our profession. These moments of fighting together with all of you are a point of great pride for me!

For more than ten years, our objective has always been to make it clear to everyone (i.e. farmers, policy-makers, citizens and farmers' organisations of every kind) that we need an effective instrument to regulate the production of agricultural products, including milk. And by **we**, I do not only mean farmers. **We** includes:

- *Farmers*, who should be able to make a decent living from their work. So that new farms are founded in all regions of Europe and family farms continue to be *widespread*, instead of farms becoming concentrated in a few regions alone;

- *Citizens*, who are also consumers. So that they can continue to have access to healthy, high-quality products that are produced in sufficient quantities in their regions, and that this is guaranteed for a long time in the future as well;

- *Policy-makers*, because they bear significant responsibility in ensuring the well-being of the citizens of Europe and the environment. A responsibility that, however, should be exercised in a way that does not infringe on the well-being of our fellow citizens in other parts of the world;

- *Farmers' organisations*, like the chambers of agriculture, associations, trade unions and cooperatives, who need to go back and take stock of their founding goals and main tasks!

For some years now, the EMB has been advocating for the implementation of the Market Responsibility Programme (MRP), which includes the important tool of voluntary production cuts. Commissioner Hogan's term of office is coming to an end and it was precisely these voluntary production cuts that resulted in clear relief in the dairy sector in 2016 and 2017. It was the only real positive decision taken by the outgoing Commissioner; this decision was, nonetheless, decisive. Voluntary production cuts showed that the EMB's demands can be implemented very quickly and easily, and that the positive effects are immediately felt on the market. I therefore call on whoever will be chosen to head Europe's agricultural sector as well as on the new European Commission and Parliament to establish and implement our MRP as soon as possible.

The approach adopted in the context of free trade agreements is also decisive for the agricultural sector. We have strongly criticised these agreements which go against farmers' interests. Producers, consumers and the environment need to be given much greater importance in these negotiations. Therefore, I call on our newly-elected representatives to engage in dialogue with us, in our countries as well as in Brussels, so that we can defend our interests, as well as those

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of consumers.

It has also been ten years since the launch of Fair Milk in Belgium – something that we look forward to celebrating in a fitting manner with our Belgian friends. The creation of Fair Milk in different European countries and, of course, the milk strikes – these singular, unforgettable events – have significantly contributed to the success of the EMB. We would like to thank everyone who has invested their time, energy and courage in our struggle!

Stand up, all dairy farmers!

I hope you enjoy reading our September newsletter.

Boris Gondouin, EMB Executive Committee member

Mercosur – The goalposts weren't 'moved', they've been burned

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One of the complaints that you'll hear most commonly cited by Irish farmers is that 'the goalposts have been moved'. This refers to the practice of Government agencies changing regulations, requirements, targets or stipulations of a policy or ambition *after* those have been set and after the people who had to meet the original regulations and requirements – usually farmers – have already started to meet those original requirements, investing

time and money in so doing.

The list of times and occasions when farmers have had to look on in disbelief while regulators or civil servants rambled onto the pitch – in mid match – and casually dug up the goalposts moved them forwards or backwards and replanted them, without so much as a nod – much less agreement – is too

numerous to cite here.

I think that's what so alarming about the Mercosur issue; it's not the fact that it was agreed at all, atrocious as that is. It's the fact that it was announced less than a fortnight after the Irish Government had published a National Climate Action Plan that seemed to signal that Ireland, having been perceived to be dragging its feet on measures to combat climate change, was now going to really accelerate its sustainability measures and make those compulsory. Farmers and the wider public were told in the Climate Action Plan that it was no longer a question of whether or not we wanted to be active in counter-

emissions measures – that decision was no longer going to be ours to accept or reject.

Our view starts from two indisputable positions on the basis that where you start from the truth and are careful not to wander too far, then you can reasonably be sure that you're on the right track. And so ICMSA's position on carbon emissions has always been that Ireland is – by any comparison – amongst the most carbon efficient producers of dairy and beef on the planet. That means that our production should, so far as practicable, be continued, while less environmentally efficient producers of dairy and beef are curtailed. That system of production-where-best-suited will work against us on other foods and we'll have to accept that. The other indisputable fact is that farmers alone cannot and must not be asked to bear hugely disproportionate costs for our society's efforts at reducing emissions. Everyone is involved in those emissions: whether it's producing the beef, selling the beef or consuming the beef, and as far as we're concerned that means everyone will have to pay a share.

Both of these ICMSA starting points are based on our acceptance of the reality of climate change. We accept the science; we accept the reality that climate change is going to present existential problems for societies unless action is taken right now. And the very first action that the scientists tell us absolutely must be taken is to end and reverse the catastrophic deforestation that's occurring in South America particularly.

We know that the South American forests are being cleared for beef production. And we know that the decision to increase the amount of South American beef that can be exported to the EU – however small that may be – will accelerate that destruction as the ranchers involved now conclude that the door has been opened and the amounts they

can export will only be going up.

As will the carbon emissions, as will global temperatures, as will the increasing global panic – and as will the bitter disillusionment of the youth as they see the hopeless contradictions involved in the EU-Mercosur deal.

The Mercosur agreement is not just another kick in the teeth for our beef sector, already facing the loss of its biggest market and one we've been selling into for centuries. It's a heavy blow to the reputation of the Irish Government and the EU and wipes out their credibility on environmental issues. That could turn out to be the heaviest blow of them all.

Pat McCormack, EMB Executive Committee Member and ICMSA President

Update from Germany

MEP Marlene Mortler (CSU) advocates for European animal welfare label

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Opinions diverge within the CDU/CSU about how a national animal welfare label should be introduced.

While Federal Minister of Agriculture Julia Klöckner would like to stick to a national, voluntary label, long-standing Bundestag member who is now a Member of European Parliament Marlene Mortler, together with the next President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen, is pushing for the implementation of an EU-wide animal welfare label. This would require a revision of the EU Animal Welfare Regulation and the EU Slaughter Regulation to be included in European Commission's work programme.

Report on German agricultural exports

According to figures published by the Federal Government, German agricultural and food exports to developing countries have almost doubled over the last ten years. Milk and milk products were among the most important exports in 2018, accounting for almost 10%.

Downward trend for farm-gate milk prices in July

The base farm-gate prices for July were between 29.49 and 35.90 cents/kg (4% fat, 3.4% protein) – up to 1 cent/kg lower than June – in spite of milk delivery volumes in 2019 consistently remaining below that of the previous year, total milk production costs amounting to 43 cents, and constant debates about more sustainability, more animal welfare, stricter standards, etc. We dairy farmers are constantly in a state of financial crisis, interrupted nonetheless by very short periods of full coverage of milk production costs. The dairy market is totally dysfunctional, and the officially-confirmed market conditions to the detriment of dairy farmers highlighted in the dairy sector study by the German Federal Cartel Office persist – "dairies have no inherent interests of their own in obtaining higher prices for their milk products." Instead of paralysing us, this situation should spur us dairy farmers on to draw attention to this situation and to demand the framework conditions on the dairy market that would give our market position its rightful place. The BDM sector strategy 2030 outlines the path to this goal.

Bundesverband Deutscher Milchviehhalter (BDM)

New US Farm Bill will offer farmers aid when milk prices fall under 350€ per ton

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(MPP-Dairy), introduced by the previous Farm Bill in 2014.

The US Dairy Margin Coverage Program (DMP) was introduced by the new 2018 Farm Bill in order to replace the Margin Protection Program for Dairy

It is a voluntary risk management program which offers protection to dairy producers when the difference between the milk price and the average feed cost (the margin) falls below a certain amount selected by the producer. The new scheme reinforces the previous program, which had proven to offer

farmers insufficient coverage.

Although it appeared with a lag of two years compared to the European Union, the current overproduction crisis now also affects American farmers. In this context, American agricultural policy has just been reformed and dairy farmers have not been forgotten. The counter-cyclical margin scheme introduced in 2014 has been considerably strengthened: the Dairy Margin Coverage Program (DMP) will offer farmers the possibility of benefiting from state aid as soon as the price of milk drops below the equivalent of about €350 per tonne. This measure is particularly beneficial to farms with less than 200 cows, which account for 82% of farms but less than a quarter of US production.

The new program introduces two major changes that should contribute to its success: the first is the lowering of the premiums that farmers have to pay to participate (to a symbolic amount of less than 1% of the guaranteed value); the second is the possibility of increasing coverage to raise the guaranteed gross margin level to the equivalent of about €182 per ton. Thus, by adding this level of guaranteed gross margin to the current feed cost of around €168 per ton, dairy farmers will receive aid that will fully offset price reductions starting from €350 per ton. Enough to cover most of their production costs for the symbolic annual contribution of €2.90 per ton.

With low or even symbolic commitment premiums for holders of fewer than 215 cows, the DMP is indeed a counter-cyclical aid program managed and financed by the federal government and not an insurance program as some might claim.

Graph: Example of a gross margin coverage of € 182/t (\$9,5/cwt)

The graph represents the different parameters of the new program with a minimum gross margin of \$9.5 per cwt, or € 182 per ton. When the price of milk (in green) is lower than the sum (in yellow) of the guaranteed gross margin and the feed costs (in orange), then the payments are triggered (the blue surfaces – represented here also over the period before the reform).

As a matter of fact, the new programme will be more advantageous for farms with up to 215 cows, i.e. producing less than 2.26 million litres per year. For larger farms, the DMC program will be less interesting. Although they enjoy the same levels of coverage for their first 215 cows, the rest of their production will only benefit from a maximum guaranteed price level of about €320 per ton in return for a much more significant commitment premium of €34.9 per ton.

This is a reflection of the political support enjoyed by family farms in the United States: their contribution to the vitality of rural communities is particularly emphasized. It also seems to pursue the objective of retaining the necessary know-how to maintain and develop the American production potential. As a matter of fact, the motivation of farmers ready to engage in a demanding production – in terms of skill, labour and capital – constitutes one of the main limiting factors of dairy development.

In the end, the strengthening of the DMC program can be seen as a means of responding to the demands of the agricultural unions in the north-east of the United States, where the farms are still predominantly family-owned, while at the same time avoiding limiting the American production potential and its growing exports.

Extracts of an article by Frédéric Courleux and Willy Olsommer, published in Agriculture Stratégies on 11 July 2019. To read the full article please visit:

Astrid Sauvage, European Milk Board (EMB)

Heat waves and storms: How are they affecting Europe's dairy farmers?

Many European countries have been dealing with a drought for a few months now. According to the Copernicus service on monitoring climate change, July 2019 was the hottest month since 1880, when periodic measurements were introduced.

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Especially in Germany, Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, heat records were smashed. Drought makes things difficult for Europe's dairy farmers. The European Commission has, therefore, published a [press release](#) that states that farmers can apply for higher advance payments. They can request up to 70% of direct payments instead of 50%, and 85% of rural development payments as early as mid-October.

You can read more about the specific situations in some of our member countries below:

Belgium

Milk and meat production in Belgium have decreased due to the heat wave in late July. Especially Western and central Wallonia are very dry. The east, on the other hand, has been able to maintain better pastures thanks to more rain. In some regions, milk producers have already had to dip in to their winter reserves as there is no new grass due to the drought.

France

The regions in central and eastern France are facing a major drought. Livestock farmers in drought-stricken areas have already started using their winter feed reserves. A decrease in the number of heads of cattle has also been observed as many dairy farmers have sold off part of their herd because of the scarcity of feed. In an attempt to counteract this trend, 69 Departements have decided to exceptionally allow mowing of fallow land. Cereal and rape seed harvests are good, while maize harvests are very poor. Maize silage was introduced as early as August, though this is usually only done in late September.

Germany

Contrary to 2018, the regional and, to an extent, local situation in Germany is highly varied. Some regions received occasional rain, while other areas have received less than 60mm/m² since April. Federal aid is being provided in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Saxony-Anhalt, Thuringia, Rhineland-Palatinate, North Rhine-Westphalia, Lower Saxony, Bremen and parts of Bavaria. In these areas, farmers can use fallow land or ecological focus areas (EFAs) for feed under certain conditions.

Netherlands

Farmers have had to deal with the drought in the Netherlands as well, especially in the eastern provinces. Milk producers are already obliged to buy in feed or dip in to winter reserves. High feed prices, especially for maize, and the falling milk price have led to tight finances. Furthermore, the number of rodents has increased en masse in the north of the Netherlands. They damage the grass root, lead to harvest losses, and generate further expenses.

Luxembourg

After a very warm and dry June and July with a new record of 40.8 degrees, there was some rainfall in August. In addition, a major tornado hit southern Luxembourg on 9 August, and caused significant damage.

The winter crop harvests were within the annual average, but things do not look good for the summer food-grain harvest. Rye and triticale have fallen off the ergot. The first and second cutting were, on an average, good; however, the third and fourth were very poor and sometimes non-existent. Grazing on pastures for dairy cows continues to be difficult. Furthermore, voles have also increased exponentially due to the drought – like in the Netherlands. All these reasons mean that dairy farmers have to buy in feed. In some cases, they are selling off heads of cattle to compensate for some of the generated costs.

Switzerland

Even in Switzerland, the weather was very heterogeneous from region to region. The Vaud canton in Romandy experienced a heatwave in June and in the following months as well. This led to a decrease in grass and crop production. The general situation, nonetheless, is not as catastrophic as compared to previous years thanks to regular downpours during the many storms. However, the canton of Jura is dealing with a relatively severe drought. These conditions have led to the implementation of agricultural emergency measures in some cantons. For example, farmers are allowed to mow biodiversity promotion areas (BFF) or to let their livestock graze on them. The objective of these measures is to allow farmers to conserve their winter reserves.

Lithuania

The drought in Lithuania lasted from April to July, resulting in a negative impact in terms of feed production for many dairy farms. The cereals sector has also been severely affected. Food-grain quality is significantly worse as compared to the previous year. Milk prices have also been decreasing since April. Over 2000 dairy farms have discontinued milk production. These are mainly small farms and include a significant number from our Lithuanian member organisation. A difficult winter with major feed shortages and the closure of more farms is expected. Hopefully, the government will provide some relief.

Vanessa Langer, European Milk Board (EMB)

Portrait: Veterinarians Without Borders Belgium

Numerous organizations worldwide are committed to improving the working and living conditions of people and animals. Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium (VSF) is one of them. We have asked the non-governmental organisation to tell us exactly what their work involves and where they are working. Aude Delcoigne, Communication and Fundraising Officer at VSF,

gives us an insight:

Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium is a Belgian NGO that fights hunger and poverty in remote African areas by improving livestock. This implies setting up local veterinary networks, training local livestock keepers, creating fodder banks and facilitating access to cattle markets, water and grazing lands. Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium implements projects in Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, Rwanda, DR Congo, Burundi, Uganda and Tanzania. Livestock farming is vital for the people of these countries. And when animals are

healthy, so are the people!

Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium believes in the power and initiatives of people in the South. That is why we work in the field together with local organizations, governments, veterinarians and farmers. They help us to fulfil our mission, while at the same time reinforcing their own knowledge, capacities and autonomy. This is our way of building a better world in a

sustainable way.

What do we do?

Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium and its local partners help livestock keepers in the mentioned eight African countries to keep their animals healthy. But we do more than just vaccinating and taking care of their herds. We help them to improve their livestock farming and everything that is connected to it.

In **West Africa**, we install modern information and communication tools, such as a mobile information system for pastoralists. Through their mobile phones, farmers can get information about the location of the nearest vet or the condition of grasslands, which helps them make informed decisions about their transhumance. In **Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger**, we support local poultry and dairy value chain development through our local partners, by improving the nutrition and health of the animals. We also help the network of milk distributors and sellers to meet the strict quality standards of local dairies.

In **Burundi and Rwanda**, we distribute goats to vulnerable families and help them build a vegetable garden. We teach them how to overcome malnutrition by having a varied diet. Animal manure increases harvest on the field, which makes money available to pay for medical expenses. In **Mali**, we implement a similar approach with poultry. By improving animal health, breeding techniques and sales, women get more eggs and income from their chickens, which improves the living conditions of their family.

We also help livestock keepers with microcredits, sales, water and pasture management as well as trainings, agricultural equipment, peace negotiations and advocacy.

What do we advocate for?

In recent years, our advocacy activities have intensified. They focus mostly on creating an enabling environment for (agro-)pastoralists according to a One Health-approach*. (Agro)pastoralists are semi-mobile livestock keepers who live in (semi-)arid lands and move around with their herds according to well-designed patterns, looking for water and high-quality pasture. By doing so, pastoralists produce meat and milk in an efficient and climate-friendly way.

Besides their need for technical assistance to optimize production and ensure the health of their herds, (agro-)pastoralists often have difficulties in securing their livelihoods which require political change. For instance, pastoralists need to be able to move freely as mobility is at the core of their livelihood. This requires access to and ownership of land, which is managed through legislation. This is why we advocate for special arrangements for pastoralists to be included in legislative documents.

Other laws and regulations should also be adapted to pastoralists' needs. In West-Africa for instance, (agro-)pastoralists struggle to develop local dairy value chains. One of the root causes of this issue is that trade regulations favour cheap imports of skimmed and fat-filled milk powder from Europe and other continents, putting the local milk production at a competitive disadvantage. In this context, advocacy is key to bring about changes in favour of local producers.

Aude Delcoigne, *Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium*

Silvia Däberitz, *European Milk Board (EMB)*

*Refers to the strategy of integrating and networking the national information, expertise, perspectives and experiences from all relevant sectors that are needed to improve health.

10 and 11 years of European milk delivery strikes

"I will not supply any more of my milk as of tomorrow." (German dairy farmer, May 2008)

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"I prefer to pour away my milk rather than be a slave to the dairy industry" (French dairy farmer, September 2009)

One quote is rational and resolute, while the other is passionate and convinced. It was a combination of these aspects that led dairy farmers in many European countries to declare a milk delivery strike 10 and 11 years ago.

Producers were rational-resolute because the implications of the *price-cost* imbalance over the last few years was evident: It is impossible to continue with such a constant shortfall. There simply must be clear consequences.

The constant shortfall, the social and economic devaluation of milk, the lack of action from decision-makers in policy and industry also elicited emotions like rage and, of course, a steadily growing fear for one's economic livelihood. In 2008 and 2009, all of this finally amalgamated in courage and striking solidarity, leading to the two most important European milk delivery strikes.

The milk delivery strikes

In **2008**, over the 10 days of the delivery strikes, some 85,000 dairy farmers in Europe participated, mainly in Germany, the Netherlands, Austria, Belgium, Luxembourg and Switzerland. In addition, the member organisations of the European Milk Board in Denmark, Sweden, Italy, Ireland and the United Kingdom engaged intensively with the press to create awareness about the demands and actions of their European colleagues.

In **2009**, 40,000 farmers, notably in France, Belgium, Luxembourg, Germany, Austria, Italy, the Netherlands and Switzerland, withheld their milk deliveries. This was also accompanied by media campaigns by colleagues in other countries. All of this had an effect – it impressed many and unleashed a wave of expressions of solidarity. For example, the milk producers received this letter: *The Taiwan Farmers Association and ATOAP (Association of Taiwan Organic Agriculture Promotion) strongly supports your European-wide strike for getting decent prices for European milk producers, prices that must make liveable incomes for you all. Through this message, we bring you our solidarity and our wish that your peaceful strike will gain its legitimate success and bring a better life as well as ensure your future as European milk producers.*

A highlight of the milk delivery strikes was in 2009 when more than 3 million litres of milk were poured away in a field in Ciney, Belgium. It was a powerful sight.

But wait! What was the result of all of this?

Did cost-covering prices and balanced accounts become a reality after the end of the milk delivery strikes? Did policy-makers implement the demanded framework conditions for the dairy sector – did they create an instrument that would correct for chronic market distortions in the future? Could dairy farmers finally stop fearing for their livelihood?

No. In 2015, the EU market was liberalised, without a functioning crisis mechanism being put in place. This resulted in further acute milk-price crises and the discontinuance of milk production on many farms across Europe.

So, were the milk strikes pointless?

Once again: No.

The strikes were the start of a Europe-wide movement that did not go unnoticed on the political front. Dairy farmers showed a high degree of determination, ready to resort to extreme measures to fight for the state of their profession. Thereafter, they were more vocal about their concerns and ideas in political discussions – and this produced results. Firstly, an EU-level observatory was set up in line with their recommendations; thereafter voluntary production cuts were implemented during the crisis of 2016 – this was the first time the crisis-generating market volumes were actively reduced on this now liberalised dairy sector.

Secondly, there have been numerous major actions, demonstrations, tractor rallies, etc. across Europe post 2008/2009, which would have been unthinkable without the milk deliveries strikes. These demonstrations of strength and solidarity have been the driving force that has kept Europe's dairy farmers going over the last 10 and 11 years. The sector thanks the producers who took a rational and, at the same time, passionate and courageous decision to withhold the delivery of huge quantities of their milk.

This commitment and determination have allowed dairy farmers to assert themselves within their sector. This is an arduous path that does not simply lead to one success after the other. But in spite of all the difficulties, it is not and has never been pointless. The next milestone for dairy farmers along this path: Legislation at EU level that anchors voluntary production cuts (including capping) as a permanent crisis instrument for the dairy sector.

Silvia Däberitz, management European Milk Board (EMB)

Invitation to European milk strike events in September

11 years ^{© EMB} of milk strikes.

Dairy farmers have planned major actions to commemorate the 10 and

The tap is closed. As of this moment. We refuse to supply any more milk to our dairies and choose instead to pour it away!

In early 2008 and autumn 2009, thousands of dairy farmers across Europe decided to stop supplying milk. The rock-bottom milk prices and the indifference of industry and policy-makers in implementing a necessary reorientation of the dairy sector had enraged farmers and endangered their livelihood for too long. Desperate times call for desperate measures: strike!

To honour the courage of these dairy farmers who launched a Europe-wide dairy sector movement with their determination, actions and events are going to be held in a number of countries this September.

France, 14 and 15 September

*"2009-2029: Dairy farmers and their struggle". Looking ten years into the past and the future: In September 2009, hundreds of dairy farmers assembled together with 300 tractors in Mont-Saint-Michel and poured away 3.5 million litres of milk. What has changed since then? Will it be possible to earn a decent income from the milk price in 2029? To learn more, do visit the **Cara-Meuh Festival in Les Viviers, 11, Route de Saint-Léonard, 50300 Vains, Normandy, France.***

Round table "2009-2029: Dairy farmers and their struggle"

When: Saturday, 14 September at 11:30

Where: Stand 21 "10 years after the milk strike"

Conference "Understanding the dairy crisis"

When: Saturday, 14 September at 16:00

Where: Stand 7 "Le Poulailler"

Conference "What will we be eating tomorrow?" (CETA, Mercosur)

When: Sunday, 15 September at 11:00

Where: Stand 7 "Le Poulailler"

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Belgium, 10 and 16 September

More than 3 million litres of milk were poured away on the fields in Ciney in September 2009. Once again, in 2019, thousands of tractors from Belgium, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and France are setting forth with their milk to protest the current milk overproduction.

Press conference

When: Tuesday 10 September, 10:00 onwards

Where: Commemorative stone, N97, 5363 Ciney (50.313160°N, 5.125139°O), Belgium

Contact: Erwin Schöpges: +32 497 90 45 47

Big rally with 1000 tractors

When: Monday, 16 September, 12:00 onwards

Where: Commemorative stone, N97, 5363 Ciney (50.313160°N, 5.125139°O), Belgium

Contact: Erwin Schöpges: +32 497 90 45 47

We cordially invite you to these actions.

It will be possible to capture some impressive images and to interview those involved in the milk strikes as well.

Cara-Meuh Festival: programme and plan (FR)

10/09/2019: press conference in Ciney (FR)

16/09/2019: 1000 tractors in Ciney (FR)

EMB press invitation for September 2019

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