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1000 tractors protest dairy income collapse at EU summit

Over 1000 tractors have assembled in Brussels as part of the European Milk Board (EMB) demand for a solution to the dairy crisis within the EU. The message from the milk producers to the politicians and Commission officials is clear: it's time for a volume reduction and it's time for the politicians to make the necessary decisions.

As the incomes of dairy farmers collapse across Europe, momentum is building behind the demand for intervention at a strategic level. Romuald Schaber, President of the European Milk Board (EMB) has repeated his demand for action from the assembled heads of state and governments assembled. *'We are asking the various authorities gathered here to reduce the EU's overall milk quota for the year 09/10 by 5 per cent as an immediate temporary measure to give desperately needed support to the milk price being received by the dairy farmers',* said Mr Schaber.

The EMB states that the only viable way forward for the EU dairy sector is a flexible supply system that can match supply to any surge or reduction in demand, but the milk suppliers accept that the details on such a scheme remains to be worked out. They point out, however, that if such a system was in operation at present that supply could be reduced to a level that would meet demand and guarantee a viable income for the milk suppliers, whose income has simply collapsed all over the EU as more and more milk goes on to a market in which demand has already fallen and continues to slide. Schaber again, '*the experience of this last year has demonstrated beyond any doubt that we must have the kind of policy that enable us to respond quickly to movements in the market – whether upwards or downwards'*.

There can be no denying the scale of the crisis faced by the dairy farmers or the bitter passion that the collapse in their income is causing. Another EMB official, Ernst Halbmayr, puts it succinctly, '*our patience is at an end. We want to see decisions taken to address this obviously flawed system and if those decisions are not taken, then the politicians and the Commission can expect to see a much more intensive campaign being mounted all across Europe by the various EMP member associations'*.

The dairy farmers acknowledge the signs contained in the final summit declaration that indicated that the heads of states and government want the Commission to take a more pro-active approach to the dairy crisis and the farmers attribute that move to the pressure already being exerted by the kind of protest that has 1,000 tractors demonstrating in Brussels. But EMB is wary of any delay in bringing forward the kind of solutions they think will work. *'We need action now', stated Schaber, 'not after a summer vacation and not in the run-up to the elections to the Bundestag, we don't have the time left for these diversions and many dairy enterprises will simply have ceased to exist if the Commission delays any longer. "Action immediately" is the message we send to the Farm Council meeting next Monday'* concluded the EMB President.

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Presidency conclusions (see page 7 for milk issue)

New French web site "vote milk strike"

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