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Anniversary of the end of the European milk strike

One year after the European milk delivery strike in May/June 2008, the milk price is worse than ever. After initially positive signals from the politicians, in the end the demands made by the European Milk Board (EMB) failed to be met. The milk market crisis is coming to a head.

Hamm, 05.06.09: One year ago, the downward trend in the milk price spurred EMB dairy farmers – particularly those in Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxemburg and Switzerland – to go on strike. For ten days the milk producers in those six countries withheld their milk and blockaded a large number of dairies. Now, one year later, the situation in the milk market is still no better. Quite the opposite, in fact: "Milk prices are at an all-time low – in no country are farmers paid more than 24 cents", says Sieta van Keimpema, Vice-President of the EMB. Often it is a paltry 20 cents per litre that milk producers receive from the dairies. It is now plain to see how important it would have been to implement the EMB's demands for flexible supply control. That could have prevented the drastic market distortions and the bleeding to death of dairy farms.

The situation was foreseeable

The measures taken by the EU Council of Agriculture and Fisheries and the EU Commission last year further exacerbated the situation, whereby more milk was allowed to be produced despite the fall in demand. "We had warned them long before that the quota increase would put even greater pressure on milk prices, especially given the decrease in demand", says Romuald Schaber, President of the EMB. The EU Commission and the Ministers of Agriculture bear full responsibility through their irresponsible policy of deregulating the market. The European Milk Board's demands to reduce the volume of milk have so far been ignored, and the crisis has gone from bad to worse.

Measures to defuse the crisis

The EU Ministers of Agriculture have to create the right general conditions for the milk market. The EMB's demand for flexible regulation of volumes is a plea for a balance between supply and demand. In addition, monitoring of the market should ensure that developments in the milk market are constantly picked up on and analysed. These demands are also supported by the agricultural organisations in the new EU member states. This was confirmed in a joint declaration made by the EMB and the Chambers of Agriculture of the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Lithuania and Poland in the Czech city of Brno on 2 June. And in recent weeks the French dairy farmers have also shown with their protest demonstrations that they are for flexible supply control. They are no longer prepared to put up with milk prices that fail to cover the costs of production.

Time may be a great healer, but not in the milk market. It is all about reacting – properly. That is what the EU politicians have failed to do: so, one year after the end of the milk strike in Europe, decent milk prices and prospects of food sovereignty have flown out of the window.

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