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Agricultural sector must not be used as a bargaining chip in trade policy

EMB calls for a halt to free trade deals at the expense of producers

The European Milk Board (EMB) views the conclusion of the free trade agreement between the EU and Australia critically. Once again, agriculture in Brussels is being misused as a bargaining chip to satisfy industrial interests and secure access to raw materials. For European milk producers, this deal represents further destabilization in an already critical market phase.

Trade policy must be rethought: agriculture out of FTAs!

The EMB calls for a fundamental shift: agriculture must no longer have a place in traditional free trade agreements (FTAs), as food is the basis of our food sovereignty. "We need a trade policy that creates stability for producers and short supply chains, instead of putting farmers under price pressure worldwide through unfair deals and forcing them out of production," said EMB President Kjartan Poulsen.

Additional pressure in times of crisis

The deal comes at the wrong time. While the European milk market is already back in a crisis and producer prices are under strong pressure, the EU is opening the floodgates for further imports. Such agreements act as accelerators of the problematic structural change. If policymakers continue to let agriculture drift in this direction, they are actively pushing producers out of the sector. It should be recalled that the 2016 milk crisis was exacerbated precisely by attempts to push additional volumes into already saturated markets – an approach that already failed disastrously at the time and does not constitute a viable solution today.

The following points will be indispensable in the future:

- Take the Strategic Dialogue seriously: The European Commission must stop using the "Strategic Dialogue" as an empty phrase. Trade policy and agricultural policy must go hand in hand instead of undermining each other. Agricultural reforms must no longer be counteracted by trade agreements. The objective must be a crisis-resilient agricultural sector that guarantees fair producer prices and genuine food sovereignty. This requires real reform in both sectors.
- In existing trade agreements: Standards without control are worthless – the EMB calls for a robust control infrastructure. If standards (social standards, animal welfare, environment) are not demonstrably met at EU level, strict sanctions and import bans must follow. Continuing with mere paper compliance is a distortion of competition to the detriment of our farmers.
- Magnet instead of exodus – a future for the younger generation. To make agriculture attractive again for the younger generation and to prevent producers from leaving the sector, planning security, cost-covering prices and attractive profit margins for producers are essential.

The EMB calls on political decision-makers, in the context of the current EU–Australia agreement, to free agriculture from the logic of sell-out. We need fairness instead of distortion of competition and stability instead of market dumping!

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