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European Parliament must not sacrifice producers' interest

Genuine strengthening of farmers in the supply chain must remain the goal

This week, the European Parliament will vote on its position regarding the proposals to strengthen producers in the food supply chain. This vote is of crucial importance – it will determine whether agriculture in Europe will finally benefit from fairer market conditions or whether the power of dairies and other processors will be further entrenched.

The Parliament has already taken several important steps in the right direction during this process. In particular, the Committee on Agriculture had included positive elements in its position that would have represented progress for producers. However, these achievements might be abandoned again in the plenary vote. Representatives of strong industrial interests are trying to rewrite the position approved by the Committee on Agriculture in favour of processors – at the expense of farmers. That would be fatal. Such a move would nullify the original purpose of the proposals – the strengthening of producers in the value chain.

The following key elements must under no circumstances be deleted:

- Mandatory contracts throughout the EU to guarantee fair and reliable framework conditions for all producers.
- Price orientation based on production costs.
- A revision clause in the contract to allow appropriate reactions and negotiations in case of problematic market developments.

The following must under no circumstances be accepted:

- Further exemptions from the contractual obligation which would otherwise completely empty this regulation of all content, and
- the deletion of the obligation for cooperatives to include contract-like provisions in their statutes. It is important that processing cooperatives must comply with this existing minimum requirement towards their members. As processors, these cooperatives mainly pursue their industrial interests, and therefore protective rules must also apply to producers in the cooperative, so that they can overcome their chronic deficit situation.

“It is unacceptable that the interests of dairies and processors are placed above the very existence of European farmers,” warns the European Milk Board (EMB). “If these positive elements are deleted, nothing will remain of an instrument intended to strengthen producers. Then the industry – including cooperatives – and their representatives in Parliament can once again pat themselves on the back for leaving farmers without room to breathe”

The European Parliament must now assume its responsibility towards farmers in the EU. It must recognise and resist the pressure currently exerted by industrial interests through spurious arguments – as this pressure directly harms Europe's farms.

Only if the measures are adopted clearly in the interest of producers can the EU finally take a step towards a fairer, more sustainable and future-oriented agriculture.

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