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Koblenz: EU dairy farmers transform the German Corner into the European Corner with powerful actions



Their appeal to EU Agriculture Ministers: “Don’t forget the social aspects of sustainability!”

(Koblenz, 31/08/2020) “We farmers are ready to do more in terms of sustainability if we are guaranteed full production cost coverage henceforth – including a fair income for producers – and that EU standards are not undermined by trade agreements!” Under this banner, a boat carrying dairy farmers from the European Milk Board (EMB) and the German dairy farmers’ association (BDM) set forth today from the *Deutsches Eck* towards the EU Agriculture Ministers meeting in Koblenz. On this day, these farmers from across Europe, together with the Fair Milk cows in the colours of different European countries onboard the vessel, transformed the German Corner into the European Corner. This location serves as the starting point for *numerous powerful actions by dairy farmers*. In addition to the highly-symbolic voyage, the BDM and the EMB also organised a demonstration and protest action at the meeting venue of the EU Agriculture Ministers to demand a holistic approach when looking at sustainability.

For Erwin Schöpges, Belgian dairy farmer and EMB President, the actions in Koblenz send an important message to the Ministers: “We European dairy farmers are ready to do our part for greater environmental and climate protection as well as better animal welfare. However, we can only afford greater environmental sustainability when the social and economic aspects are also given the same degree of consideration. It is the only way to ensure that farms stay in business and that young farmers have future prospects.” During the demonstration at the Rhein-Mosel Hall, the meeting venue for the Agriculture Ministers, Sieta van Keimpema, the EMB Vice-president from the Netherlands, adds: “It is also essential that European standards are not undermined by imports from third countries. A comprehensive sustainability strategy must prevent product dumping. This is only possible if agricultural products are excluded from Free Trade Agreements.”

While doling out the soup they have landed in before the Agriculture Ministers – a symbolic action representing the misguided agricultural policy, dairy farmer and EMB Executive Committee member Boris Gondouin from France comments: “A comprehensive sustainability strategy also includes a milk price where you can earn a living. However, we see a chronic shortfall in cost-coverage across Europe due to excessively low prices. The Coronavirus pandemic was just one more in an entire string of crises that has pushed producer prices to rock-bottom.” His colleague Erwin Schöpges specifies: „We represent a sector, where crises are nothing new, and the latest crisis has proven that instruments like intervention storage offer no real solutions. What we need are effective crisis instruments that would allow for flexible temporary supply adjustments. The [Market Responsibility Programme](#) is the EMB’s constructive contribution toward finding just such a solution.”

“Effective crisis instruments and a reorientation of EU agricultural policy are the only way to ensure the continued production of high-quality milk products. We must move away from the current *cheap and more* model, where producers are forced to cheaply produce agricultural raw materials at their own cost, and move toward *real socially, economically and environmentally-sustainable production*,” reiterates Johannes Pfaller, EMB Executive Committee member and dairy farmer from Germany, as they sail toward the Agriculture Ministers on the Mosel in the afternoon. His clear appeal to the EU Agriculture Ministers: “If you truly want to strive for sustainability in Europe and want to successfully implement the currently proposed strategies like the Green Deal and the Farm to Fork Strategy, then you have to work with farmers and not against them. Meet with us and let’s work together to ensure the sector’s future.”

In addition to political advocacy, the EMB dairy farmers also rely on their own strength and direct contact with consumers. For example, the [Fair Milk](#) brand, which has been launched on the market by dairy farmers themselves in a number of European countries, has clearly shown that cost-covering prices are not a mere pipe dream. But if this brand is to go beyond a market niche and become a player on the general dairy market, the appropriate political framework – as described above – is a must. This framework should be determined through in-depth discussions with farmers in the EU.

Background:

You can read about proposals to effectively engage dairy farmers to achieve the EU Sustainability Strategies [here](#).

[Pictures of campaigns](#)

[Signs used during the campaigns](#)

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[<<< back](#)