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Press release 6th of October: “A step forward, but by no means far enough”

5,000 demonstrating dairy farmers take note of the proposals put forward by the Ministers of Agriculture and the Commission of the EU on setting up a High-Level Group. However, they are expecting serious steps towards flexible supply control.

Brussels, 06.10.2009: 5,000 dairy farmers from France, Germany, Belgium, Austria, the Netherlands, Italy, Luxemburg and other countries pulled up in their tractors outside the EU Council building while the EU Ministers of Agriculture were meeting there to discuss the disastrous milk market situation. The EU Commission had proposed to the Ministers of Agriculture the formation of a so-called High-Level Group, whose remit would include working on contractual relations between milk producers and dairies with regard to balancing supply and demand, on possibilities for strengthening the milk producers' position, on the possible introduction of futures markets in the dairy sector and on transparency and information for consumers.

Romuald Schaber, President of the EMB, commented on the EU proposals: “The politicians have taken a step forward today. But it is by no means far enough. The working group they proposed must be enlarged by representatives of the milk producers and become a permanent institution. The dairy farmers' action today and in the last few weeks is staggering. Only their action made it possible for the politicians to take the milk crisis issue seriously and initiate initial changes.”

Daniel Condat of the French OPL: “The Commission and the Council are now aware of the problems. But nothing definitive has been decided.” Pascal Massol from the French APLI adds: “The milk producers will keep on being very active, will keep on protesting strongly until effective measures are actually put in place. In mid-October the European milk producers will turn up in Luxemburg en masse when the Members of the Council officially meet.”

Romuald Schaber criticises the course of the EU so far: “The political decisions taken by the EU in recent months have not helped overcome the situation threatening the livelihoods of the dairy farmers in Europe. The increase in volumes coupled with a drop in demand has made prices plummet. In turn, export subsidies aimed at flooding the world market with surplus volumes are resulting in dumping outside Europe and are damaging the developing countries in particular. There has to be a change of system. The mechanisms of the market must be used positively by adjusting supply to demand so as to achieve fair, cost-covering prices.”

Sieta van Keimpema, Vice-President of the EMB makes it clear: “The EU Commission talks about a slight price increase and says its measures had played an effective part in that. That is not true. It is down to the action of the farmers, who took the initiative to adjust volumes in the last few weeks, and is also partly a seasonal phenomenon.”

From 11.00 hours on, the milk producers massed outside the Council building vehemently making their demands for flexible control of volumes. More than 1,000 tractors parked in long convoys in the streets of the Belgian capital. For over three weeks now the dairy farmers have been protesting intensively throughout Europe. More than 500 million litres of their milk have been withheld from the dairies in eight countries; there have also been blockades of motorways and dairies, demonstrations outside political institutions, warning fires, milk has been thrown away and given away to consumers all over Europe. The politicians on both national and European level reacted, for instance by calling the Extraordinary Meeting of the EU Ministers of Agriculture on 5 October.

“The door has opened a little”, says Erwin Schöpges from the Belgian MIG of the results of the EU Extraordinary Meeting yesterday. “But the European dairy farmers know only too well that they have to continue their struggle until we have flexible supply control.”

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Press release

<<< back