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International EMB press conference on farmer protests

Fundamental market reforms for cost-covering prices! - Taxpayers' money/subsidies cannot save agriculture -

As the European Milk Board reported at their press conference in Brussels today, subsidies are not going to stop the farmer protests that are taking place in numerous countries. "For those, like us, who have been following the developments in the agricultural sector over the last few years and decades, it is clear that the protests being organised now have not simply cropped up but are driven by very specific causes," says EMB President Kjartan Poulsen. "These deep-rooted causes cannot be addressed with minor, cosmetic fixes or, worse yet, ignorance." In fact, it is precisely this disregard for the situation of producers over so many years that has pushed the agricultural system into severe imbalance, where producers are constantly under increasing pressure. "This pressure can only be relieved through fundamental, lasting reforms to the agricultural system," continues Poulsen.

Far-reaching reforms for a languishing sector

The current calls to protest show that the pressure is rising, instead of abating. For example, French farmers have announced a national day of action on 25/01/2024 to demand the much-needed improvements from policy-makers.

For Véronique Le Floch, President of the French organisation Coordination Rurale (CR), signals sent to policy-makers are unmistakable: "The current protests in Germany, France and elsewhere show that a Europe with such poor prospects in the agricultural sector is being rejected. Carrying on with an ultraliberal policy, in which free trade agreements and foodstuffs imports that do not meet our standards are proliferating, poses a real threat to farmers."

Protests are also continuing in Lithuania. After setting warning fires in fields throughout the country at the beginning of January, several hundred farmers are now heading this week to the Lithuanian capital Vilnius with their tractors. They demand, among other things, effective solutions to the current milk crisis from political representatives.

Italian farmers have also planned important protest actions. On January 30, a national mobilisation will take place throughout Italy. Italian producers want to reach, among others, a reform of the Green Deal as well as an end of dumping practices on foodstuffs.

Over recent weeks and months, it has become clear to many that policy-makers, in particular, must react and can no longer shy away from their responsibility and from confronting reality and excessively-powerful market actors. "We need far-reaching reforms that would finally end the current extremely unequal distribution across the value chain to the detriment of producers," explains the EMB President.

This specifically means that cost-covering producer prices must be achieved on the market through:

- 1. The active implementation of crisis instruments from the Common Market Organisation like the voluntary production reduction as well as the further development of the instrument in the direction of automatic activation in the case of imminent crises. The Market Responsibility Programme charts the way forward for such further development of the voluntary production reduction.**
- 2. Specific EU contract clauses on, inter alia, volumes and cost-covering prices prior to milk deliveries. This must apply for all market actors, including cooperatives.**
- 3. An EU-wide regulation that makes cost-covering prices obligatory.**
- 4. Strict mirror clauses for imports and reliable compliance monitoring.**
- 5. Measures to intensify producer pooling to effectively reduce the power imbalance on the market.**

Such a market framework is also necessary within the context of the Green Deal, to ensure stable prices on the market and to allow farmers to meet environmental requirements. Dairy farming must be profitable, so that the next generation can also enter the sector. "In addition to the legislative framework, it is also important to support producer projects like [Fair Milk](#),"

underlines Poulsen.

There is no way to sidestep these market reforms – the European Milk Board is absolutely certain of this. It must be in the interest of the EU at many levels to take these protests and the problems faced by farmers earnestly. In addition to respect for farmers and their essential work, it is also about food security for EU citizens and, at the end of the day, faith in democratic institutions. This faith weakens even further when such important, socially relevant topics are not taken seriously. Against the backdrop of the upcoming European elections as well, it is important to take effective action now and to create real prospects for farmers through far-reaching market reforms.

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