

News Details

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The only thing missing for a perfect anniversary - a crisis instrument



EMB celebrates 10-year anniversary / The milk producer movement calls for a standard crisis instrument for the dairy sector

Protest marches in major European cities, over 1000 tractors driving through the centre of Brussels, milk dripping down the windows of the European Parliament, meeting with the Pope in Rome: These are just four of the many actions undertaken over the years by the European dairy farmers of the European Milk Board (EMB) that have made an impact on policymakers and the public. However, this association of milk producers is also known for constructive political dialogue and their participation in EU working groups, where they have put forth concepts to help create a stable dairy market. The results include a Block Exemption Regulation, which made its way into the EU Milk Package, the Milk Market Observatory (MMO) and the current voluntary production cuts at EU level. The sector, nonetheless, still needs a standard crisis instrument.

Brussels/Nunspeet, 10.11.2016: "Stand up if you are a farmer!" is the motto of the European milk producers who have been fighting together as the EMB against the disintegration of farming since 2006. "EU policy that barely lived up to the goals of the CAP - market stability and ensuring an adequate income in the agricultural sector - made founding the EMB absolutely necessary," reminisces EMB President and dairy farmer Romuald Schaber. "Even back then, solidarity with colleagues from other countries and working toward common goals was very important to us. We did not want to be played against each other; we wanted, in fact, to work together toward a fairer agricultural sector." The EMB, representing about 100,000 milk producers, has embodied precisely this solidarity for the last ten years. Members work together for fairer milk prices, but also for an agricultural model that takes into account animal welfare and ensures balanced regional development - goals that are important for society at large.

Constructive efforts helped overcome significant hurdles

There have been a number of political achievements in this period: The EMB proposal for a Block Exemption Regulation led to producers being allowed to bundle supply in the 2012 Milk Package. The concept of a monitoring body was included to some extent in the Milk Market Observatory (MMO) and voluntary production cuts, an essential feature of the EMB Market Responsibility Programme, was introduced at EU level this year. In the last ten years, the Fair Milk campaign also led to the creation of dedicated milk brands in six European countries, thus establishing direct relations between farmers and consumers.

Being constructive and contributing to finding solutions has been the ethos of this milk-producer organisation from the very beginning. "We never wanted the EMB to just be a constant thorn in the side of policymakers. We want to shoulder our responsibility as producers and be seriously involved in political discussions," explains EMB Vice President Sieta van Keimpema in relation to the intentions of the EMB's members. "We would like to thank everyone from the political sphere, civil society and the dairy sector who have supported us over the last ten years."

There has been some progress, but there is still a lot to be done for the dairy sector

The one-time measure of voluntary production cuts must now lead to a standard crisis instrument as illustrated in the Market Responsibility Programme (MRP).

This would first require a legislative framework that:

1. Establishes a market index through the MMO
2. Introduces caps for the remaining production during voluntary production cuts in times of crisis, together with sanctions to ensure that the caps are enforced, and
3. Allows the collection of a levy from producers to finance the crisis instrument.

Stronger participation of milk producers all across Europe

Farmers have made significant contributions as well as a number of sacrifices over the last ten years. The milk supply strikes of 2008 and 2009 are remembered by all as an intensely difficult period, but also as a necessary action. Enormous effort was put into protests and political action - an energy that stemmed from both courage and desperation. "We would like to thank everyone for their unique and amazing commitment over the last ten years. We would not be where we are today without your fantastic efforts," says Romuald Schaber, addressing his fellow colleagues all across Europe. He says that farmers rose up and refused to remain silent or to allow themselves to be pushed out of production due to inappropriate agricultural policies. He adds that the dairy sector is still not where it should be if it is to avoid crises in the future. "The only thing missing to make this anniversary perfect is a standard crisis instrument. But we will keep fighting for it together!" declares Schaber, emphasising the milk producers' plans.

Some political representatives as well as certain interest groups were definitely not always happy about European milk producers speaking with such a strong and confident voice. But that is precisely what was and remains important. Farmers and vibrant rural areas are integral to supporting our food system and our societies. The EU also needs the committed, democratic input of its citizens. It is a union that should live off such constructive participation. Therefore, the European dairy farmers of the EMB will continue to work according to their motto: "Stand up if you are a farmer!"

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