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World Milk Day 2026: Dairy Farmers Make Political Failure in the Milk Market Visible

European protest action by BDM and EMB against the systematic devaluation of farmers' work

With a provocative protest action shortly before World Milk Day (1 June), dairy farmers from the German Bundesverband Deutscher Milchviehhalter (BDM) and the European Milk Board (EMB) are making publicly visible what, in the farmers' view, has been politically ignored for years: the systematic devaluation of farmers' work and the performance of their animals.

Several tractor units carry a common political message and simultaneously spray milk across a field on a large scale. The message of the action is: "The real waste is not taking place today on this field – it is happening every day in a market that systematically devalues high-quality food."

On World Milk Day, the value of milk is publicly celebrated. At the same time, dairy farmers – with the exception of very few years – have been working under ruinous economic conditions. "Today, we are making visible what normally remains invisible – the silent devaluation of our milk and therefore of the work performed by both people and animals," explain BDM Chairman Karsten Hansen and EMB President Kjartan Poulsen. "While retailers and the food industry secure their profits and market positions, producers are left alone to deal with the consequences of political misjudgements."

The action is part of a European protest against the continued inaction in agricultural policy. The fact that it is taking place in Germany is a deliberate decision. "For years, Germany has acted as a brake on European initiatives aimed at stabilising the milk market or improving the market position of producers," criticises BDM Chairman Karsten Hansen. "Several countries support the activation of voluntary supply reduction in the current market crisis. Germany remains conspicuously passive. At the same time, the German government is looking for loopholes for processors regarding the contractual obligation between processors and producers initiated by the European Commission, instead of strengthening the position of dairy farmers."

The persistent crises in the milk market do not arise by chance; they are the result of political framework conditions that encourage overproduction and systematically weaken the market position of producers. Like many other agricultural sectors, dairy farms are under enormous pressure. Costs for energy, feed, machinery, buildings and regulatory requirements continue to rise, while milk prices are largely determined by dairies, retailers and the world market – without any real bargaining power for farms. As a result, many farms are left with only one option to survive economically: produce more and don't receive any income. Yet this very dynamic further aggravates the crisis. "Producing more in order to earn less – that is the reality for many dairy farms," explains EMB Chairman Kjartan Poulsen, a dairy farmer from Denmark. "This is not the individual failure of farmers. It is the logic of an agricultural market system that continues to be defended despite all warnings."

"It is cynical to shift responsibility onto farms while, at the same time, effective crisis instruments are being blocked and measures to improve the market position of producers are being undermined," criticises Karsten Hansen. "Dairy farmers are ready to take responsibility for their market, but it must be ensured that this can be done in an organised way and therefore have a real market impact."

"World Milk Day cannot simply be a glossy public relations event while farming livelihoods are being weakened and destroyed at the same time," stresses Kjartan Poulsen. "Anyone who jeopardises our farms, our work and our future must expect strong resistance."

With their action, BDM and EMB call for concrete political measures:

- Activation of Voluntary Volume Reduction at EU level: reduction of non-demanded volumes to immediately stabilise the milk market.
- Mandatory contracts before delivery: clear agreements on price, quantity, quality and duration before delivery – no delivery into uncertainty.
- Genuine reforms of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the Common Market Organisation (CMO).

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