

News Details

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- “Vibrant & profitable”-

Milk producers demand a new European agricultural policy that also supports young people

This year's most-recent General Assembly of the European Milk Board asbl focused on the young generation of farmers. Dairy-farmer delegations from across Europe discussed how to make the sector profitable once again, in order to attract young people towards agricultural production. Committed young farmers contributed to this emotional discussion with impressive speeches and presentations. The question “What is important for young farmers?” was at the heart of the lively, constructive exchanges, where the young participants explained their priorities and points of view. Furthermore, Pierre Bascou, Deputy Director-General of DG Agriculture and Rural Development, accepted the EMB's invitation and attended as a representative of the European Commission. He talked to the General Assembly about the EU's recent young farmers strategy as well as about measures to improve producer position.

“A fresh policy for young people for a vibrant sector,” said EMB President Kjartan Poulsen, summarising producer demands for policy-makers. He underlined the importance of the profession and the need to create economic and social prospects in order to motivate the next generation to join the sector and to keep farmers of all ages active in production. Today, the sector is not characterised by vitality, but rather by constant, highly justified protests by socially marginalised farmers. “We practise one of the most important and, in fact, one of the most beautiful professions,” said EMB Vice President Elmar Hannen. “But there are absolutely no economic or social prospects, which is a heavy burden to shoulder and this means that the next generation does not dare enter this sector.” He said that this not only affects farmers, but is severely damaging for society as a whole because the foundation for stable, profitable food production in Europe is crumbling.

Young voices from the agricultural sector

The demand for stable sectoral conditions was echoed in the speeches by younger farmers from Latvia, France, Germany, Ireland, Denmark and Belgium, who came to attend the General Assembly. A young representative from Ireland, for example, said that the next generation does not want to work to live off subsidies and thus end up as welfare recipients. The message from Latvia was loud and clear - young farmers have no place in agriculture and this needs to change. A young farmer from the cross-border Belgium-Luxembourg-Germany region said that he has seen many family farms in the surrounding villages going out of business for years now. Young farmers had many questions, as they have no idea what the future holds for their children. As a young farmer from France put it, we cannot afford to lose any more producers. In this context, he is optimistic about projects like Fair Milk as a solution, as they distribute margins fairly. A Belgian farmer pointed to the issues related to the criteria currently demanded by consumers, which, however, farmers cannot be expected to fund themselves. Young Danish farmers believe that fair prices are important and that they must go hand in hand with a clear regulatory framework that would create planning certainty for the next 10 years. The next generation also highlighted the importance of dairy farmer organisations at both national and European level. As a young representative of the German dairy farmer's association (BDM) underlined, he decided to join the BDM and the EMB as they are the only organisations that put forward proposals that would improve his quality of life.

Pierre Bascou, Deputy Director-General of DG Agriculture and Rural Development, who had been invited by the EMB as a representative of the European Commission, provided some information about financial support for young farmers. On improving producer position in the food chain, he also went through the Commission's plans regarding contracts and the UTP Directive. Attendees at the GA welcomed the fact that the European Commission was now taking producer income as well as producer position along the value chain more seriously. They nonetheless stated that real, effective results must be on the table very soon. The EMB will keep a close eye to see if words are followed by action. The EU simply cannot afford to lose any more farmers.

Reforms for a vibrant sector

There are ways to restore the vitality of the sector. Firstly, the European agricultural market must be reformed to include the following aspects:

- Appropriate crisis instruments like the [Market Responsibility Programme](#)
- [EU legislation](#) that makes prices that are higher than production costs obligatory
- Suitable EU contract clauses that, for example, guarantee cost-covering prices and must apply to cooperatives as well

- Mirror clauses to ensure that imported products comply with EU standards
- Exclusion of agriculture from free trade agreements
- Strengthening producer organisations so that they are truly empowered to effectively negotiate for farmers.

There is yet another way to restore the vitality of the sector, and farmers have been exploring this possibility on their own accord for some years now. The optimistic *Fair Milk* project, which is active in some European countries, charts the way forward for the sector as a whole. *Fair prices & fair income for farmers!* As Boris Gondouin, EMB Executive Committee member from France, explained, Fair Milk producers are true pioneers, who embarked on this flagship project with great energy, tireless work and unwavering optimism, and continue to keep it thriving every day. “We are proud of these projects,” said Gondouin. However, he added, Fair Milk needs more public support and recognition.

Everyone at the EMB General Assembly agreed that without fair market rules, there can be no real prospects. This means that the future work of the EMB involves continuing to put forward constructive proposals and solutions and lobbying political decision-makers like the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of EU to take on their responsibility in implementing them.

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