



News Flash 3

26 March 2020

Feedback from Agriculture Council of Ministers 25 March video conference

1. COUNCIL: Main conclusions of the 25 March conference

In response to the difficulties the EU is facing, the Commission referred to the **Corona Response Investment Initiative** to quickly direct €37 billion of European public investment to deal with the fallout of the COVID-19 crisis. Regarding state aid, maximum amounts were raised, up to EUR 120 000 per undertaking active in the fishery and aquaculture sector or EUR 100 000 per undertaking active in the primary production of agricultural products. For companies active in the processing and marketing of agricultural products, the threshold is set at EUR 800 000. In addition, the Commission has announced an extension by 1 month of the deadline to submit the single application for direct payments and other area- and animal-related measures in 2020.

They also recognised that additional specific and targeted measures are needed to support the agricultural and fisheries sector of the EU, responding to specific country needs.

Ministers and the Commission confirmed their willingness to explore further measures for the support of EU producers.

The Croatian Presidency said it will use the exchanges of 25 March as the basis for the future work in weeks to come.

Agriculture Ministers pointed out that sufficient food has been and will be available for European consumers. Measures already proposed by the European Commission in all sectors including transport and introducing “green lanes” for food supply, health and social security together with flexibility regarding state aid are helping to overcome this situation.

Member States proposed additional measures as a possible response to the Coronavirus crisis in agriculture and fisheries including **the simplification of or derogation from certain procedures**, for instance in relation to on-the-spot controls, modification of rural development programmes, reporting or fulfilment of obligations undertaken by beneficiaries. Increased flexibility in implementation of CAP measures and in transferring of approved funds between measures and programmes was proposed, as well as facilitating advance payments, and activation of intervention and crisis measures foreseen in the Common Market Organisation Regulation.

2. Positions from different stakeholders ahead of the Council meeting

COPA-COGECA: calls for the proper functioning of the Single Market

As you may recall, Pekka Pesonen - SG from Copa-Cogeca - offered all AFCC (Agri Food Chain Coalition) members to input in the presentation he was asked to make for the 25 March Agri Council video conference (Flash #2 for more details).

Please find for information his speaking notes and the background note that was shared with the 27 ministers of agriculture. The background note is based on Copa-Cogeca members’ and the AFCC’s reflections while his speaking note for the video conference is a concentrated

message, mainly in support of the proper functioning of the Single Market. He told us that he only had 3 minutes available and therefore, no detailed description was possible.

The background note however covers our issues:

We cannot afford to compromise on animal health. For this reason, it is essential that all Member States implement the new Commission Guidelines (23rd March 2020) and consider all veterinary medicines (i.e. vaccines, medicines, genomics, diagnostics, sensors and required tools for livestock production) and breeding material “as essential goods” and related services “as essential services” (veterinarians, animal healthcare personnel).



Speaking note Agri
Council 20200325.pdf



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In their note Copa-Cogeca warned EU ministers that the coronavirus crisis could put the futures of “both the single market and international markets at stake. They warn that:

- border closures have been creating “a critical situation” in the food services and hotel industries sector;
- the **dairy** market is showing “several signs of potential disturbance” linked to the loss of some processing channels and private storage aid may be needed to relieve some pressures;
- **with meat** consumption habits shifting toward processed supermarket meats and away from high-value products, changes to “tariff rate quota management, for instance in the case of imports of high value beef cuts” would need to be considered.

35 NGOs & 40 MEPs call for the suspension of live animals

Ahead of the Council meeting, over 35 animal welfare organisations called for the suspension of exports of live animals to non-EU countries as well as of transport of animals over long distances across internal borders. The main argument of the 35 NGOs is that neither veterinarians nor the police have time during the COVID-19 crisis to enforce compliance with animal welfare requirements. The call for suspension is also supported by 40 MEPs.

Call for measures to ensure farm labour

Farm employers have asked the Commission to **introduce measures to avoid a shortage of labour** in agriculture. They stress that action was needed to make sure that measures taken to tackle the virus do not come at the cost of “endangering the essential workflow of critical sectors such as agriculture.

Young farmers call for COVID-19 assistance

The European Council of Young Farmers (CEJA) are seeking assistance for the sector & measures to bolster consumer trust. They ask that the EU agricultural **crisis reserve** should be activated “with priority access given to the most affected sectors.” “We believe that the level of the reserve should be increased for the year 2020 in order to lessen further market disruptions.”