



# Farm policy reform: cut bureaucracy for farmers and rethink greening measures, says Agriculture Committee

Committees: Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development

**To meet growing demand for secure supplies of high-quality food and at the same time step up competitiveness in the face of growing market pressures, EU farm policy must become fairer and less - not more - bureaucratic, said Agriculture Committee MEPs, debating post-2013 reform proposals with Commissioner Dacian Cioloş in Strasbourg on Monday. Neither should "greening" measures hinder cultivation of arable land, they added.**

Proposals to cap direct payments for bigger farms and a new requirement to set aside 7% of arable land will simply create a "huge bureaucratic monster", said Peter Jahr (EPP, DE). He was echoed by Britta Reimers (ALDE, DE) and Mairead McGuinness (EPP, IE), who said the proposed measures were "all but simple".

Proposed new rules unveiled by the Commission on 12 October would link support for farmers with "greening" measures, such as maintaining permanent pasture and crop diversification, but also set aside 7% of farming land, a measure criticised by many MEPs. "It is in the medium and long term interest of farmers to have greening component in direct payments", said Commissioner Cioloş. The package also includes a plan to cap direct payments to bigger farms receiving more than €150,000.

## Capping must not hurt cooperatives

"Linking direct payments to environmental farming practices is absolutely essential, but we have to think about farmers' ability to implement them", said Ulrike Rodust (S&D, DE). Co-operatives should be exempted from the Commission plan to cap direct payments for bigger farms, she added, saying that cooperatives, greening and job creation must be at the heart of the reform.

The fear that capping would hurt small associations of farmers was also voiced by Mr Sergio Gutiérrez Prieto (S&D, ES), while José Bové (Greens/EFA, FR) said that "starting the degressive approach only at the level of €150,000 is not going to solve anything."

## "Greening" measures under fire

The idea of setting aside 7% of arable land "is contrary to current need for a secure and steady supply of food to EU citizens", said Elisabeth Köstinger (EPP, AT). Sergio Paolo Francesco Silvestris (EPP, IT) asked what olive producers should do: "Do we force them to chop their olive trees, or to plant grass under them?"

Iratxe García Pérez (S&D, ES) stressed that the proposals "do not take into account different situations in different Member States" and together with Georgios Papastamkos (EPP, EL) called for a longer list of measures "to take account of the diversity of twenty-seven Member States".

## Fairer distribution of EU funds

# Press release

"We have an unequal situation in the EU and unequal conditions for competition", said Jarosław Kalinowski (EPP, PL), referring to the uneven distribution of EU funds among farmers in different Member States. "I don't see why a Lithuanian farmer should receive less than Danish farmer", said Janusz Wojciechowski (ECR, PL), stressing that EU treaties prohibit discrimination based on national identity.

But inequalities also exist among farmers within each Member State, said Wojciech Michał Olejniczak (S&D, PL), pointing out that the "entire reform does not remove discrepancies" where similar farms receive "different levels of support", and stressing that the reform should bring "more justice and more equality."

The transition of EU Member States from the current support scheme to the new Basic Payment Scheme will be more complicated for new EU countries than for old ones, warned Csaba Sándor Tabajdi (S&D, HU).

The decision on the reform package will be taken only once MEPs have received more information about how it is to be funded. Mariya Nedelcheva (EPP, BG) therefore asked that decisions on national budgets within the EU's Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) be taken as soon as possible.

## Next steps

The Agriculture Committee is preparing, in cooperation with the EU's Polish presidency and the Commission, for an extensive public debate on the future agriculture policy. The first event takes place on 7 November, when the Agriculture Committee will welcome representatives of farm ministries from Member States to discuss the proposals unveiled on 12 October.

The reformed farm policy, closely linked to the new Multiannual financial framework, is to enter into force on 1 January 2014.

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