

# School milk and fruit: agriculture MEPs promote healthy eating

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**New measures to strengthen and boost funding for an EU scheme to provide fruit, vegetables and milk products in schools were backed by the agriculture committee on Monday. They put more emphasis on educating children in healthy eating, increase the budget and merge into one the current separate schemes for milk and fruit in schools.**

"A healthy, balanced diet is the foundation of good health but the consumption of fruit, vegetables and milk has been declining across the EU. This is why it is of the utmost importance to strengthen the school fruit, vegetables and milk scheme by increasing its budget and making it more focused on healthy-eating education. Parliament also ensured the financial stability of the programme by preventing member states from unilaterally cutting its budget or changing the criteria for allocating EU funds among themselves," said Marc Tarabella (S&D, BE), who steered the legislation through Parliament and led the EP's negotiating team.

The agriculture committee endorsed the deal struck between Parliament's negotiators and the Luxembourg Council presidency on 10 December by 30 votes to six, with one abstention.

## **Sharing out €250 million a year for healthy eating measures more fairly between member states**

Parliament won an additional €20 million a year for milk measures. This brings the annual funding for milk and milk products up to €100 million, with €150 million for fruit and vegetables.

MEPs also insisted on a fairer distribution of EU funds between member states by setting two core criteria for the entire scheme (the share of six to 10-year-old children in the population and the degree of development of the region within the member state). Past levels of milk-scheme funds will be taken into account and possibly reviewed after the first six years of the new scheme and will be topped up with a new, minimum annual amount of EU aid per child.

## **More emphasis on education**

To make the EU school scheme more effective, member states must do more to promote healthy eating habits, local food chains, organic farming and the fight against food waste, MEPs insisted. The educational measures should also better connect children with agriculture, for example through farm visits and the distribution of local specialities such as honey and olives.

## **Products eligible for EU funding**

Parliament insisted that when foodstuffs are distributed in schools, under-consumed, local, fresh products should have priority over processed foods.. Member states will be able to distribute processed foods like soups, compotes, juice, yoghurts and cheese only in addition to fresh fruit and vegetables and milk or lactose-free milk.

The EP ensured that only products with a healthy nutritional content can be distributed. Added sweeteners and artificial flavour enhancers will be banned.

# Press release

The distribution of products with added sugar, salt and fat should be allowed only as an exception, MEPs insisted. Strict limits to the amounts of these additives in the final product will be defined at EU level and the product will still have to be endorsed by a national health authority before it can be made available to school children under the EU scheme.

Products containing added fruits, nuts or cocoa, such as chocolate milk or yogurts with fruits, and flavoured foodstuffs will still be eligible for EU funding under the school scheme. But MEPs ensured that the EU will only pay for the milk part of it, which must make up at least 90%, or in exceptional cases, at least 75%, of the final product.

## Next steps

The agreed text still needs to be approved by Parliament as a whole at its March or April plenary session before going to the Council for its approval at first reading.

## Note to editors

*The school milk scheme was set up in 1977. The school fruit scheme, which includes a provision for education, was introduced in 2009. Both schemes were created to promote the consumption of fruit, vegetables and milk and milk products but they have so far operated under different legal and financial arrangements. All 28 EU member states participate in the school milk scheme and 25 in the school fruit scheme ( the UK, Finland and Sweden do not take part).*

*The consumption of fruit, vegetables and milk is still falling across Europe. Over 20 million EU children are overweight and adolescents on average eat only 30% to 50% of the recommended daily intake of fruit and vegetables.*

## Further information

- Steps of the procedure: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/popups/ficheprocedure.do?reference=2014/0014\(COD\)&l=en](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/popups/ficheprocedure.do?reference=2014/0014(COD)&l=en)
- Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/agri/home.html>
- Marc Tarabella (S&D, BE): <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/en/29579.html>
- EP Research briefing note: New scheme for fruit and milk in schools: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS\\_ATA\(2015\)557016](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_ATA(2015)557016)
- Allocation of EU funds for school fruit & vegetables in 2015/2016 per member state: [http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/newsroom/196\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/newsroom/196_en.pdf)

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