



New EU farm policy: greener, fairer and better able to deliver food security

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To deliver secure supplies of high-quality food while protecting the environment better, the new EU farm policy must make "greening" measures mandatory but flexible and help farmers to cope with market challenges. So says Parliament's position, as voted Wednesday, for negotiations with EU member states as voted on Wednesday. This will be the first EU farm policy reform shaped by Parliament as a full co-legislator with EU member states.

"Today we have struck a proper balance between food security and improved environmental protection, so that the new EU farm policy can deliver even more public goods to EU citizens. But it also must be made less bureaucratic and fairer to farmers, not least to empower them to cope with crises. This will be our position when negotiating its final shape with member states", said Agriculture Committee chair Paolo De Castro (S&D, IT), after the vote.

Fairer and transparent funding for working farmers

Differences among EU member states in the levels of EU funding for farmers should be reduced slightly faster than the European Commission proposed. No member state's farmers should receive less than 65% of the EU average..

Parliament also voted in favour of the publication of beneficiaries of EU agricultural funding and inserted a list of land-owners, such as airports and sports clubs, which should automatically be excluded from this funding unless they prove that farming contributes a substantial share of their income. Member states could extend this list.

More money for young and small farmers

Young farmers should get a 25% top-up payments for a maximum of 100 ha and member states could also use more money to support small farmers.

But less for bigger ones

Parliament backed Commission plans to cap direct payments to any one farm at €300,000, and substantially reduce payments to those receiving more than €150,000. However, this would not apply to cooperatives which redistribute payments to their members.

More flexible greening

MEPs agree that 30% of national budgets for direct payments should be made conditional upon compliance with mandatory greening measures, but stress that these measures must be made more flexible and gradual. The three key measures - crop diversification, maintaining permanent pasture and grassland and creating "ecologically-focused areas", would remain but with certain exceptions, e.g. to reflect the size of the farm.

Empowering farmers to cope with crises

Press release

To help farmers cope with market volatility and strengthen their price bargaining position, their organisations should be given new tools and allowed to negotiate input and delivery contracts, say MEPs. These rules "must not translate into cartels, but strong producer organisations should allow farmers to break free from economic dependence and guarantee them a decent standard of living", said rapporteur for the Common markets organisation regulation Michel Dantin (EPP, FR).

"This decision reflects the voice of European citizens on how the future EU farm policy should look. We need to ensure that we keep and promote rural economies and that competitiveness and protection of environment are compatible. This is how we can best use public money to deliver public goods for everyone", said rapporteur for the Direct payments and Rural development regulations Luis Manuel Capoulas Santos (S&D, PT).

Milk, sugar and wine

To ensure that the expiry of milk quotas does not lead to a serious crisis in the milk sector, MEPs suggest granting aid for at least three months to milk producers who voluntarily cut their production by at least 5%. Amendments calling for prolongation of milk quotas, set to expire in 2015, were rejected by the House.

By contrast, Parliament vetoed plans to allow sugar quotas to expire in 2015, so as to enable beet producers to prepare for the liberalisation of the sector in 2020. Vine planting rights should also be prolonged until at least 2030.

Less bureaucratic spending controls

MEPs stress the need to cut red tape and ensure that penalties for breaching rules are proportionate. "We need to cut the time farmers spend on paperwork. Member states could now create an aid application that would remain valid for several years so that farmers do not have to register their claim each year but only when there are changes", said Giovanni La Via (EPP, IT), rapporteur for the financing, management and monitoring regulation.

Next steps

The final shape of the new EU farm policy will be decided by the European Parliament, EU farm ministers and the European Commission, in three-way negotiations which should begin in late March/early April.

Results of the vote

The draft mandate for negotiations with member states on the future direct payments rules was approved by 427 votes to 224, with 32 abstentions.

The draft mandate for negotiations with member states on the future rural development rules was approved by 556 votes to 95, with 18 abstentions.

The draft mandate for negotiations with member states on future common market organisation was approved by 375 votes to 277, with 24 abstentions.

The draft mandate for negotiations with member states on financing, management and monitoring rules was approved by 474 votes to 172, with 23 abstentions.

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