

WRITTEN QUESTION P-2474/07
by Bernadette Bourzai (PSE)
to the Commission

Subject: Future of the sheep sector

The European Union has for a long time been in state of structural deficit in relation to the world market as regards the sheep sector. This deficit is increasing all the time: in 2004, Europe met only 80 % of its needs, compared with 87 % 10 years before, and European sheep production fell by 14 % between 1993 and 2003.

Over the last 10 years, the sheep sector has been buffeted by successive crises affecting the ruminant sector. The overall supply of heavy lamb from the European market was significantly disrupted by the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease in 2001. As imports from third countries could not make up for the sudden shortfall in supply, market balance was restored by a significant rise in consumer prices.

Today, new health scares in the south of the Union and the change in circumstances brought about by the introduction of aid decoupling have further contributed to the decline in sheep stock in several countries, particularly in France, where the difference in revenue earned by sheep farmers and beef farmers is encouraging the former to abandon sheep production.

Sheep production is essentially based on grazing land. As sheep can live in fairly inhospitable conditions and can survive on roughage, and given that sheep farming is less lucrative than other forms of agricultural production, this type of farming is often concentrated in areas affected by natural, geographical or climatic handicaps. Sheep farming therefore plays an essential role in terms of contributing to the economy and sustainability of areas that face the most difficulties and in terms of managing the countryside, a role which is today in danger.

What does the Commission intend to do in the coming months in order to safeguard the future of the sheep sector in Europe?

Is the Commission considering evaluating and reforming the sheep meat CMO, which was last reformed in 2001? Is the Commission going to carry out an assessment of the situation in the sheep sector in the Member States with a view to the 2008/2009 revision in order to evaluate its impact on rural development policy and on the balance between the two pillars of the CAP?