Future of the sheep/lamb and goat sector in Europe

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The Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development adopted an own-initiative report by Liam **AYLWARD** (UEN, IE) on the future of the sheep/lamb and goat sector in Europe. This report follows the study commissioned by the Parliament on the subject.

The report recognises the urgent need for action to be taken by the Commission and the Council of Agriculture Ministers to ensure a profitable and sustainable future for sheepmeat and goatmeat production in the EU, to encourage the consumption of such products once more, and to retain and attract young sheep and goat farmers to the sector. It also advocates the maintenance of these traditional, eco-friendly farming enterprises as well as the provision of a Community supply base of EU sheep and goat farming products.

MEPs call the Commission and the Council of Agriculture Ministers to direct additional financial support, as a matter of urgency, to EU sheep and goat producers in order to develop a vibrant, self-sufficient, market-led and consumer-orientated sheep and goat sector in the EU. They call again on the Commission and the Council to examine the future of these sectors as part of the CAP 'Health Check', giving each Member State the flexibility of choosing from the following possible options for funding, while not overlooking the need to avoid distortion of competition on the internal market:

- introduction of a new Environmental Sheep Maintenance Scheme per ewe to be either a) financed directly by EU funding or b) co-financed by EU and National Governments to arrest the decline in production; such funding would be linked to the positive environmental attributes associated with the maintenance of sheep production as well as achieving improvements in technical and quality areas of production;
- analysis of the availability and utilisation of unused funds under Pillar 1 and Pillar 2 of the Common Agricultural Policy, with a view to redirecting that support to the sheep and goat sectors;
- amendment of Regulation (EC) No 1782/2003, as part of the CAP 'Health Check', so that Member States can allocate up to 12 % of their national payments to measures to support sectors in difficulty and to maintain agriculture in less favoured areas;
- inclusion of measures in support of sheep and goat producers among the new challenges arising from the CAP 'Health Check' under the second pillar, with the possibility of using Modulation support funds.

MEPs note that the return to the producer for sheepmeat products as a percentage of the retail price is insufficient and draws attention to the Parliament's Written Declaration on the need to investigate and remedy the abuse of power by large supermarkets operating in the European Union. They call on the Commission to investigate the sheepmeat and goatmeat supply chain to ensure that farmers receive a fair return from the marketplace.

Amongst other things, the European Commission is called to:

- foster a climate of direct sales by producers and producer organisations in order to limit artificial increases in price;
- introduce an additional payment for rare traditional and regional breeds of sheep and goat in order to maintain biodiversity in agriculture and to preserve sheep in sensitive areas;
- allow 14 days' notice to livestock farmers for on-farm cross-compliance inspections;
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improve its ability to respond to animal diseases and to reassess existing import quota management regimes to ensure that EU-produced lamb is not exposed to unfair competition;

- ensure funding for EU sheepmeat and to change, simplify and streamline the practical rules governing the operation of the budget so that lamb products can be given meaningful access to the budget;
- undertake, at Community level, a communication campaign targeted at consumers as a whole, stressing the nutritional and health benefits of the products concerned and boosting consumption.