EU protein deficit: what solution for a long standing problem?

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The Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development adopted the own-initiative report drafted by Martin HÄUSLING (Greens/EFA, DE) on the EU protein deficit.

The report notes that the total EU protein crop production currently occupies only 3% of the Union's arable land and supplies only 30% of the protein crops consumed as animal feed in the EU, with a trend over the past decade towards an increase in this deficit.

Historically, this significant deficit in protein crop production goes back to **previously established international trade agreements**, especially with the United States, which allowed the EU to protect its cereal production and in return allowed duty-free imports of protein crops and oilseeds into the EU (GATT and 1992 Blair House Agreement).

70% (42 million tonnes in 2009) of the raw materials rich in plant proteins consumed, especially soy flour, are **imported**, mainly from Brazil, Argentina and the USA. Approximately 60% of these imports (26 million tonnes) are by-products derived from vegetable oil production and are used as meals, especially soymeal, for animal feed. These producers are not subject to the same environmental, health and GMO regulatory constraints as European producers.

The EU livestock sector is vulnerable to price volatility and trade distortions, and depends on affordable and high quality protein imports. **The sector's competitiveness is undermined** by the additional costs of protein imports for feed incurred by the lack of an EU technical solution to the current zero tolerance policy on low level presence of unapproved GMOs.

The report highlights that **rebalancing the supply and consumption of cereals, proteins and oilseeds** in the EU could have major economic benefits for farmers and the food and feed industry, as well as improving the variety of healthy, high-quality food for consumers. The Commission communication of 17 November 2010 clearly highlights the need to enhance protein crop production within a more integrated crop rotation system.

In this context, Members call on the Commission to take a **medium- to long-term view in reviewing its policy on proteins**, ensuring that its legislative proposals for CAP reform include adequate and reliable **new measures and instruments** which support farmers in improving crop rotation systems so as to substantially reduce the current protein deficit and price volatility.

The Commission is invited to:

- submit a report on the possibilities and options for **increasing domestic protein crop production** in the EU by means of new policy instruments;
- report on the **impact of the zero tolerance rule for the presence in imported feed of GMOs** which are not authorised in Europe, giving particular consideration to the possibility of introducing limit values and their practical application;
- maintain the **common organisation of the market in dried fodder** in place until 2013 so as to ensure the continued survival of this key sector, which is vitally important in the production of feed proteins for the livestock sector;

- **support research** into breeding and supply of protein crop seeds in the EU, including their contribution to disease control;
- propose, **in the context of promoting rural development**, measures to promote an increase in the number of animals with biological material of high value and productive potential;
- propose a framework for rural development measures which introduce improved, decentralised facilities for the production of animal feed;
- carry out an **appraisal** evaluating the effects of current import tariffs and trade agreements on the various oilseed and protein crops and to submit to Parliament and the Council a detailed legal study on the current scope of the Blair House agreements on the production of protein crops in Europe;
- ensure an **unhindered supply of soya to the EU market** by providing a technical solution regarding the low-level presence of GMOs in protein crops for food and feed imported into the EU;
- consider including in its legislative proposals for a reformed CAP and beyond this the **promotion of crop rotation with protein crops** as a precautionary measure against crop disease and a contribution to improved agricultural practices and new challenges such as food security, climate change, management of resources etc and in recognition of the fact that local and proximity farming are of greater benefit to the environment;
- adopt suitable measures **creating market conditions that favour local production** as compared to imported products, and that meet the requirements of the feedstuffs industry;
- submit a legislative proposal to Parliament and the Council which **authorises the use of processed animal proteins from slaughter offal** for the production of feed for monogastric animals (pigs and poultry);
- introduce a **specific framework programme** for decentralised agricultural and rural development research and to improve European and international cooperation;
- propose a coherent overall political approach to the application of the **agro-environmental rules** to food products sold within the Union with regard to the importation of genetically modified protein crops;
- establish a **monitoring mechanism on the origin of protein crops imported into the European Union**;
- consider including in its legislative proposals on CAP reform the provision of **support for farmers** cultivating protein crops in crop rotation systems which contribute to the reduction of GHGs and the EU's crop protein deficit and improve disease control and soil fertility;
- bring forward incentive-based measures to promote the **cultivation of fallow land**, which could contribute significantly to reducing the protein deficit in the EU.