Common organisation of agricultural markets (CMO): simplify the common agricultural policy (CAP), creation of one single Regulation ("single CMO Regulation")

2006/0269(CNS) - 18/12/2012 - Follow-up document

In accordance with Council Regulation (EC) No 1234/2007 (CMO) Regulation), this Commission report concerns the implementation of the European School Fruit Scheme over the first three years of its functioning in the period running from 1 August 2009 to 31 July 2012.

The key elements of the Scheme are as follows:

- distribution of products in educational establishments, ranging from nurseries to secondary schools;
- accompanying measures to raise awareness about the importance of fruit and vegetable consumption as well as healthy eating habits;
- networking, monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of Schemes in individual Member States.

The initiative, fully endorsed by the European Parliament, paves the way for **EUR 90 million** of European funds to co-finance the purchase and distribution of fresh and processed fruit and vegetables and bananas to school children every year, as well as for a number of related measures.

Evaluation of the scheme's functioning and its impact on children's eating habits: after only three years of the European School Fruit Scheme, it is **still too early to draw definitive conclusions**, particularly with respect to its sustainable impact on children's eating habits.

The report notes, however, that it may nevertheless be established that, judging by the initial evaluation results and the Commission figures from the monitoring exercise, **the Scheme has been successfully embedded in the Member States** and that its **efficiency is increasing** in terms of the budget used and the benefits for children (over 8 million) compared to the start-up phase.

The results of most of the national and regional evaluations indicate that **the Scheme has led to an increase in the amount of fruit and vegetables consumed by children**. By way of an example, Poland recorded a 21% increase in consumption.

- In some cases, encouraging children to eat more fruit and vegetables also has a positive spill-over effect outside the official distribution times in schools.
- The differences were observed in relation to gender, with girls consuming more fruit and vegetables than boys, as well as in types of products, where fruit is preferred to vegetables.
- Some evaluations have furthermore observed the Scheme's positive impacts, particularly in relation to socio-economically disadvantaged groups, which have warmly welcomed the Scheme.
- Other evaluations indicate that the impact of the Scheme was positive as regards parents' attitudes towards their children's diets.

As regards the Scheme's effectiveness, national evaluations indicate that **the Scheme has strong potential** and is an appropriate tool to exercise a positive influence on the eating habits of children and parents alike, encouraging them towards consuming more fruit and vegetables in the future.

Recommendations: several recommendations and proposals for improvements were put forward in the evaluations carried out by the Member States and the external contractor, as well as by the European Court of Auditors special report published in 2011. Some of the most important recommendations have already been addressed with the proposed changes to the Scheme in the context of the CAP 2020 reform proposals.

Thus, in order to enable even more children to benefit from the Scheme, the Commission has proposed **further strengthening it by raising the overall EU budget available for the Scheme to EUR 150 million**.

It is also proposed to:

- **increase the EU co-financing rate**, as the current 50% and 75% are seen as obstacles to higher uptake;
- aim at **sustained distribution** (35 school weeks) as only sufficiently long participation can generate a sustainable impact with respect to improving children's eating habits;
- offer at least **5 to 10 different products** to keep children interested;
- continue to distribute products **free of charge**;
- offer products **more often**, ideally three times a week;
- **extend the Scheme's target group** to allow more children to benefit from it;
- adopt a targeted approach to more '**vulnerable**' groups;
- **make the accompanying measures eligible** for EU aid by providing a minimum level of funding with a view to strengthening their role and ensuring consistent implementation.

Perspectives: given this positive feedback concerning the Scheme's effectiveness and efficiency after the first three years of implementation, it is important at this stage to start thinking about the future. Moreover, the ECA report called for **greater coordination and synergy between the School Fruit and School Milk Schemes** to make sure that they present a harmonised approach to nutrition and that they are managed efficiently.

In this respect, the Commission :

- has launched an **impact assessment process** which will build on the findings of the evaluations, the improvements already made, and take into account the ECA report;
- will assess the impact of the existing schemes and analyse if and how they should evolve in the future by considering different options, including a possibility of a new wider scheme;
- will examine the role and design of accompanying measures which are an important tool for informing and educating children about the importance of agricultural products, agriculture and farming, as well as about healthy eating habits and lifestyle.