Current situation and future prospects for the sheep and goat sectors in the EU

2017/2117(INI) - 04/04/2018 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development adopted the own-initiative report by Esther HERRANZ GARCÍA (EPP, ES) on the current situation and future prospects for the sheep and goat sectors in the EU.

The report noted that sheep and goat farming are low-profit sectors in most of the EU, with incomes among the lowest in the EU, chiefly as a result of high operating and regulatory costs. Imbalances in the food chain aggravate the vulnerability of these sectors and the Commission has so far failed to take the necessary regulatory action, called for by Parliament, in this regard.

The sheep and goat sectors account for 3 % of European milk and 9 % of European cheese production, and together they employ 1.5 million people in the European Union.

Brexit could cause significant changes to intra-EU trade in sheep meat, given that the UK is the largest producer and the main gateway for imports from third countries.

Better support: Members called on the Commission and on the Member States to:

- increase voluntary coupled aid for sheep and goat farming in the forthcoming reform of the common agricultural policy;
- further assist young farmers through incentives for the setting up or taking over of sheep or goat farms;

- consider offering incentives to farmers who practice transhumance;
- develop specific programmes enabling women to find their place in these sectors.

Promotion and innovation: the report called on the Commission and the Member States to:

- step up support for research into innovative production methods and technologies with the aim of strengthening the competitiveness of the sheep and goat sectors, and promoting meat, dairy and wool products in the internal market;
- encourage more regular consumption through information campaigns on cooking and preparation methods;
- support the exploitation of the high potential of traditional sheep and goat farming practices through agri-tourism.

Good practices and improving markets: the Commission is urged to:

- set up an **online platform** focused on the sheep and goat sectors with the main purpose of exchanging relevant good practices and data from the Member States;
- draft guidelines for good practices for marketing products from the sheep and goat sectors that can then be shared among the Member States and with professional organisations;
- bring forward proposals on **price transparency** in the sectors in order to provide consumers and producers with information to on product prices;
- foster a climate of **direct sales** by producers and producer organisations in order to limit artificial price increases;
-

ease the administrative requirements for opening small cheese-making ventures on sheep and goat farms, thereby enabling farmers to boost the added value of their farms.

Brexit and trade agreements: Members asked the Commission to:

- ascertain what the post-Brexit sheep meat market will look like, and to put necessary measures in place to prevent severe market disturbances, including the establishment of a more efficient safety net for prices and markets in order to protect the sector from the impact of Brexit;
- introduce a **mandatory EU labelling regulation system** for sheep meat products, possibly with an EU-wide logo, to allow consumers to distinguish between EU products and those from third countries;
- provide assistance in opening export markets for EU sheep meat and offal in countries where unnecessary restrictions currently apply.

Health aspects: Members called on the Commission to:

- provide incentives and support for sheep and goat farmers who can demonstrate that they have attained high vaccination coverage among their animals, in keeping with the European One Health Action Plan against Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR), as there would otherwise be little market incentive for farmers to do so;
- improve its ability to respond to outbreaks of animal diseases, such as bluetongue, by means of a new EU animal health strategy, research funding, compensation for losses, advances on payments, etc.;
- facilitate the use of immunoprecise vaccines as a first measure to combat possible disease outbreaks in the sectors.