# School's scheme for fruit, vegetables, milk and dairy products foreseen by the Common Market Organisation Regulation

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The Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development adopted an own-initiative report by Carmen AVRAM (S&D, RO) on the implementation of the school scheme for fruit, vegetables, milk and dairy products under the Common Market Organisation Regulation.

Members recalled that a healthy lifestyle, including regular physical activity, is an increasingly important issue and should become a priority for society. Promoting a healthy diet is a preventive measure against disease and an investment in public health. One in three children in the EU between the ages of 6 and 9 is overweight or obese. Nutrition education is essential to stimulate healthy eating habits and should therefore be improved across the EU.

The main conclusions and recommendations of the report are as follows:

***Budget***

Members regretted that in many cases the amount of EU funding received by Member States is **insufficient** to reach all target groups in all regions, to encourage all schools to participate and to achieve the desired impact. They regretted that some Member States do not make full use of the available budget, mainly due to the high number of administrative and bureaucratic procedures.

The Commission is invited to:

- **increase the total budget** for the school scheme for fruit, vegetables, milk and dairy products and to consider a fair redistribution among the participants of the scheme, so as to reallocate amounts not used by some Member States to others that demonstrate their willingness and capability to use more than their indicative allocations;

- take into account the situation of children with severe food allergies, intolerances and other dietary restrictions and to allocate additional funds for the purchase of diversified alternative products within the scheme to ensure its inclusiveness;

- assess the possibility of synergies between the school scheme and existing healthy breakfast initiatives and regular school meal programmes, as well as other sources of funding;

- take steps to ensure that Member States guarantee a **minimum quality level** for the products covered by the scheme.

***Educational measures***

The report noted the need to align the educational measures with the objectives of the Farm to Fork strategy and Europe’s Beating Cancer Plan. It stressed that **farm visits** are a critical tool to enable children and adolescents to reconnect with agriculture, to familiarise themselves with sustainable farming

practices. It underlined the need to better involve teachers and other school staff, relevant competent authorities in the educational measures and to promote the participation of other stakeholders in the educational measures.

Members called on the Commission and Member States to increase the use of digital tools and digital learning materials, building on the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, to complement face-to-face educational activities where necessary. They invited Member States to ensure that at least **10% of the funds** allocated each year to the schools programme from EU and national support are allocated to educational measures.

***Scope of application***

The report stressed that the products for distribution should **originate in the EU** and essentially be unprocessed, where applicable organic, locally produced and, if possible, with European quality indications.

Members called on the Commission to introduce obligations to ensure that products meet objective criteria, including health, environmental, quality and ethical considerations, animal welfare, seasonality, variety, availability of local products, giving priority to short supply chains. They encourage the distribution of at **least 25% organic products** in the EU's school programme.

Members insisted that products containing sugars, fats, salt or sweeteners should not be permitted within the scheme. They suggested placing self-service juicers in schools to allow the production of natural orange juice (without the addition of water). While future implementation of the programme should focus on nurseries, kindergartens and primary schools, attention should also be paid to secondary schools.

***Streamlining the administrative process***

Members called on the Commission and Member States to **reduce the administrative burden** of implementing the scheme, especially in the context of distribution measures, in order to increase participation rates and the use of national budgets. They suggested simplifying procurement procedures, extending running times of the contracts and in doing reducing the administrative burden associated with inspections so that schools wishing to participate do not have to shoulder the administrative burden.

The report stressed that procurement procedures should ensure that equal access and fair competition are in place so that large suppliers are not unfairly advantaged to the detriment of farmers participating in the scheme. Member States should reduce and **simplify the level of documentation** required of the beneficiaries of the scheme in order to alleviate the administrative burden they face.

Members propose to create a forum to encourage Member States to share best practices in order to identify successful ways to streamline the implementation of the scheme.

Lastly, the Commission should develop an **enhanced communication and publicity strategy** in order to boost the take-up of the scheme by schools in the Member States, especially those with low participation rates.