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

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The European Parliament adopted by 534 votes to 57, with 23 abstentions, a resolution 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.

Parliament's main conclusions and recommendations 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.

Parliament recalled that products that do not meet the quality criteria have a negative impact on the implementation of the scheme by contributing to **food waste**. The Commission and Member States are invited to evaluate the amount of food waste generated by the school scheme and to identify potential causes, clarify the issue of unused products and provide guidance on curbing food waste associated with the scheme.

Educational measures

Members recognised the importance of educational measures to raise awareness of the nutritional value of fruit and vegetables, in particular fresh, seasonal, local and regional produce, as well as milk and dairy products. They stressed that farm visits are an essential tool for children and young people to reconnect with agriculture and learn about sustainable farming practices and the key role that EU agriculture plays in ensuring access to healthy and nutritious food and its contribution to environmental protection. Teachers and other school staff as well as relevant competent authorities should be better involved in educational measures.

Member States are invited to ensure that at least **10% of the funds allocated** each year to the schools programme from EU and national assistance are used for educational measures.

Scope of application

Parliament 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. Exemptions allowing for the distribution of certain types of products with limited sugar and fat content should be analysed, in view of their strict limitation or removal.

Members suggested placing self-service juicers in schools to allow the production of natural orange juice (without the addition of water).

Streamlining the administrative process

Parliament 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. It 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 resolution 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.

Members proposes 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.