Milk and milk products: common organisation of the markets COM, additional general rules for drinking milk

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The ESC welcomes the Commission's move to streamline the rules on production and to incorporate health and hygiene aspects in the relevant blanket directive so as to ensure uniformity. The ESC considers that the proposal fails to place sufficient emphasis on the flexibility needed to give consumers freedom of choice as regards the range of drinking milk and authorized fat content. The Commission is inconsistent when it cites the absence of consumer demand for a change in classification as grounds for its refusal to authorize lower fat contents in the case of Finland and Sweden yet at the same time says that consumer demand for semi-skimmed and skimmed milk has shot up. The proposal to extend the derogation is necessary because of the importance of drinking milk on these markets and the way consumer choice looks today. One way of increasing the consumer's range of choice, without any change in the current basic rules, would be to authorize a variable rate of up to 0.5% instead of 0.3% as at present. The derogation currently applicable to Finland and Sweden is extended for a further two years. In view of the transitional rules from which other countries have benefited in this matter, the ESC feels that a longer transitional period of five years would be more appropriate to enable the two countries to undertake the necessary adjustments.