Plant proteins: culture on set-aside land of oilseeds, protein crops and fodder following the BSE crisis

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The committee adopted the report by Struan STEVENSON (EPP-ED, UK) on the Commission communication. It was critical of the Commission's preferred option of importing plant proteins for use in animal feed as a cheaper solution than promoting their cultivation in the EU, and warned that this placed the EU in a vulnerable situation and did not represent a lasting response to the EU's plant protein needs. MEPs also pointed out that many of the imports consisted of soya cake, most of which was genetically modified. The committee believed that the protein shortage should first be eased by lifting the ban on fishmeal in ruminant feeds. In the longer term, the EU should boost its production of plant proteins such as legumes, cereals, grasses and brassicas, through improved plant breeding. The report pointed out that, whilst the US was increasing its aid for soya production (possibly in contravention of international trade rules), the EU was obliged by international agreements and the EU's Agenda 2000 farm accord to reduce it. However, the EU could get round these restrictions by using the rural development provisions of the CAP to provide aid for crop rotation and earmark a percentage of land for oilseeds. Lastly, the committee pointed out that the accession states were 80% self-sufficient in plant proteins and should be encouraged to produce them for the ready-made market amongst the existing Fifteen.