

Leaf tobacco: premiums and guarantee thresholds for the 2002, 2003 and 2004 harvests (amend. Regulation (EEC) No 2075/92)

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The committee adopted the report by Arlindo CUNHA (EPP-ED, P) amending the proposal under the consultation procedure. It was opposed to the Commission's attempts to begin phasing out subsidies to tobacco growers and said that no decision on the future of the tobacco regime could be taken until the results of studies currently under way were available later in 2002 or 2003. It also pointed out that the Commission was due to present a new proposal on the tobacco sector in 2003. The committee pointed to the socio-economic importance of leaf tobacco, which was concentrated in the poorest areas of the EU, and the difficulty of changing to alternative crops. It opposed the quota and premium cuts planned by the Commission for the 2002, 2003 and 2004 harvests on the grounds that they would hit low-income growers too hard, hinder the restructuring of tobacco farms and fail to encourage producers to switch to crops for which demand and prices were higher. It also opposed the Commission's plan to increase tobacco producers' contributions to the Community Tobacco Fund. It pointed out that the Fund, which was set up to combat tobacco addiction through research into less harmful and more environmentally-friendly crops and information campaigns on the harmful effects of tobacco, and was already funded to the tune of EUR 20 million a year, had been greatly under-used. It rejected the Commission's plan to switch support under the Fund from agricultural research to conversion schemes for producers and said conversion measures must be funded separately, with additional finance, and not from producers' premiums. Lastly, the Commission was asked to report on the management of the Fund before the end of the 2003 marketing year.