The simplification of the common organisation of the market COM in fruit and vegetables

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report by Maria Esther HERRANZ-GARCIA (PPE-DE, ES) on the simplification of the COM in fruit and vegetables. The committee urged the Commission to come up with its legislative proposals for the reform of this sector "by July 2005". It wanted the Commission to introduce greater flexibility and subsidiarity in the conditions governing recognition and operation.

The committee said that the current ceiling for the Community contribution to the operational funds should be maintained in general terms. However, it should be increased from 4.1% to 6% in case of transnational partnerships, mergers, associations and cooperation between organisations, since the current limit is incompatible with the cofinancing percentage for transnational partnerships.

MEPs also believed it necessary to increase the level of Community cofinancing to 60% in cases of cooperation, mergers and associations between producer organisations which fulfil minimum criteria as regards sales volumes and constitute an added value in terms of the concentration of supply with regard to the situation at the outset, taking into account the number of member producers.

The report called for the introduction of an effective system for managing market crises in order to prevent abandonment of the sector in the face of major price collapses which, moreover, do not in practice have repercussions on consumer prices. This system should enable producer organisations to play an active role in the marketing of their products; nevertheless, provision should be made for crisis management systems both in a horizontal regulation and in the organisation of the market in fruit and vegetables.

MEPs deplored the lack of a Community strategy and research to revive consumption and said that, in connection with the regulations aimed at promoting Community agricultural products inside and outside the EU, a specific item should be created, amounting to EUR15 million each year, for increasing fruit and vegetable consumption. That item should be periodically reviewed on the basis of the uptake of funds for generic campaigns which have to highlight "EU origin" and draw attention to quality and not only to quantity.

Support schemes for the processing of soft fruits (such as sour cherries, currants, raspberries, strawberries and gooseberries) and apples should also be introduced in order to adjust to the present production and market conditions.

Lastly, the committee called for the budget devoted to the fruit and vegetable sector to be fully used and for any saving resulting from the reform to be ploughed back into that budget, making optimum use of the various support measures for producers.