

Specific rules for the fruit and vegetable sector

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The Council held a policy debate on fruit and vegetables, on the basis of a Presidency questionnaire (8204/07) focusing on two of the key issues identified, which covered the examination of the proposal, namely the proposed decoupling of the processing aid for fruit and vegetables and the inclusion of crisis management tools within the Operational Programmes of the Producer Organisations.

The Council noted the support of a large majority of delegations for the principle of decoupling of the processing aid. However, several delegations felt that decoupling would have to be phased in or partial for certain sensitive products such as citrus, tomatoes, soft fruits and prunes.

The proposed introduction of crisis-management tools in the sector was welcomed by many delegations. While many delegations endorsed the integration of crisis management into the POs' operational programmes, several considered that crisis-management measures should be accessible to all producers and not restricted to members of POs.

The Council invited the preparatory bodies to continue the examination of the proposal, with a view to seeking agreement in Council in June.

Commissioner Fischer Boel reiterated the Commission's readiness to cooperate with the Presidency to reach an agreement. She said she was prepared to examine suggestions for transitional arrangements as long as these did not dilute the ultimate goal of full decoupling.

The proposal is intended to improve the attractiveness of Producer Organisations (POs) and to simplify their rules. The budget for POs is currently around EUR 700 million. It also proposes that crisis-management tools be organised through Producer Organisations (50% co-financed by the Community budget). The proposed crisis-management tools include green harvesting / nonharvesting, promotion and communication tools in times of crisis, training, harvest insurance, and financing of the administrative costs of setting up mutual funds. Withdrawals would be carried out by POs with 50% co-financing.

The European Parliament's opinion is expected on 21 May.