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Commission response to the European Pigmeat Reflection Group's recommendations

AGRIFISH Council, 20 March 2023

The report contains **26 recommendations** covering the three pillars of sustainability.

Six of them are addressed to the Commission (more tools for producer organisations, valorising EU protein sources, promoting EU quality and production standards, developing organic farming and GIs) and concern initiatives and areas under my responsibility. I will articulate in a moment how the Commission can respond to them.

Ten of them concern the area covered by my fellow Commissioner Kyriakides with whom I have shared the Group's report and discussed the matter.

Ten recommendations relate to the socio-economic dynamics of the sector, four to environment and climate challenges, two to research and innovation, six on animal health and four on animal welfare.

On the socio-economic dynamics of the sector

- Promoting cooperation between farmers is indeed a powerful way of allowing family farms to continue operating in rural Europe while giving them the possibility to get together and speak with one voice for a meaningful amount of production so that, on the one hand, the sale of their

products attracts a fair price in the value chain and, on the other hand, farmers can respond to societal expectations.

- What the Commission can do in the matter is already foreseen in the Common Market Organisation and has been strengthened again in the last CAP reform.
- The CAP strategic plans also contain a whole range of available tools that the Commission encourages Member States to use efficiently for more sustainable pig farming, including the newly created sector-related interventions for a targeted approach to the sector, with CAP funds.
- As long as EU consumers are preferring some parts of the pig carcass rather than others, the sector will continue to need exports. Recent history has shown how important it is not to depend on a single outlet. Diversifying export markets will thus be an important task for the sector.
- On my side, I can confirm that I stand ready to continue being the ambassador of EU agricultural product quality around the world, including for the pig sector, notably on the occasion of High Level Missions but also trade fairs and exhibitions around the world. Soon I will be visiting Japan on 2-6 July 2023, accompanied by a business delegation of senior representatives from the EU agri-food sector. The pigmeat sector is among the sectors that are particularly encouraged to apply for it.
- On the import side, efforts are also needed to reduce the sector's dependency on imported protein. I can announce that the Commission will come up with an EU protein strategy in a year's time that will have a holistic view to the matter and propose avenues for the future.
- The recommendation with regard to raising awareness on organic farming and GIs in the pig sector is a very important one. In April 2021, the Commission set out a comprehensive action plan for the development of organic production in the EU. As you remember, the Commission presented a list of 23 specific actions.
- In the context of the EU's agricultural promotion policy, the Commission is already promoting actively organic products, and it will continue to do so in the future. For 2023, selected campaigns will inform EU and global consumers of the various EU quality schemes and labels such as GIs or organic products. The latter category will benefit from allocated funding of up to €28 million to stimulate demand for organic products. An additional €36 million will support the promotion of sustainable agriculture practices beneficial for the climate, the environment and animal welfare and the consumption of sustainably produced agri-food products.

- I want to assure you that the Commission is making every effort to reach out to producers in the Member States to encourage new GI applications. These efforts notably cover organising “mini-conferences” in Member States together with national authorities, highlighting the benefits of GIs and the application process.
- Looking into the future, the ongoing GI review aims at enhancing the uptake of GIs, including through incentives for GI applicants.
- To finish on the socio-economic dynamics of the sector, the Group also addresses a number of recommendations to Member States that I can support wholeheartedly, in particular when it comes to testing different agricultural risk management strategies and tools with the involvement of pig producers at national and regional level or linking the benefit of risk management tools with concrete actions to adjust supply to demand.

On environment and climate challenges

- The four recommendations proposed by the Group on environmental and climate challenges are largely addressed to Member States, their farm advisory services but also research institutes. I am also convinced that there is an important role for farmer's organisations to get involved in the process of improving farmers' awareness of the need to embrace more sustainable agriculture.
- Moving towards more sustainable, environmentally and animal-friendly systems of pig production should be a priority for the sector. Reducing greenhouse gas emissions originating on pig farms can be achieved by better animal husbandry, feed management, manure management, etc. I fully support a more efficient use of organic fertilizers. Manure, the oldest fertilizer of the world, contains many useful and recyclable components. Better using them would also be beneficial and would help to reduce dependency on nutrients imported from third countries. The new regulation on fertilizers which entered into force in July 2022 should improve the situation in this matter.
- I certainly encourage Member States to use the improved CAP framework for pig farmers to become more sustainable.
- I am encouraged by the fact that the pig sector supports the EU target to be climate-neutral by 2050 and is convinced to move in this direction. I fully agree with the views expressed by the Group about carbon farming and biogas plants. Biogas and biomethane can add value to the pigmeat sector. I support the initiative of developing cost-effective, local biogas plants based on slurry, residues and waste that involve not only pig farming but also local communities. The public and local acceptance of renewable

energy production from wind, biomass, biogas and photovoltaic is a key issue here.

On research and innovation

- I fully agree with the two recommendations on research and innovation. No one needs to convince me of the importance of research and innovation. Certainly, we need better information and involvement of end-users in research and innovation projects and speeding up knowledge transfer between farmers, advisors and researchers, making better use of farm advisory services.
- If we want to take a step forward, to respond to different challenges, farmers and the whole farming community need to have the necessary know-how, skills and tools for sustainable agri-food systems.
- We have significant funds in the EU budget allocated to support research and innovation. Under the current research programme Horizon Europe, the Commission is investing about EUR 9 billion into R&I on “Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resource, Agriculture and Environment”. More than one third of this budget is allocated to promoting knowledge and innovation in agriculture. Nearly EUR 2 billion are foreseen for different calls in 2023-2024.
- The Commission promotes cross-sectoral cooperation and the involvement of farmers, advisors and other actors in research projects. To be eligible, proposals must implement a ‘multi-actor approach’ to ensure that knowledge and needs from various sectors, researchers, farmers, advisory services, agri-food industries, consumers and NGOs are brought together. This allows to better use their practical and local knowledge or skills and to speed up the acceptance and take-up of new ideas and solutions developed in the project¹.
- The EIP-AGRI Operational Groups funded in regions/countries under the CAP also enable connection between end users, advisors and researchers within the Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System (AKIS).

On animal health and animal welfare falling under the remit of Commissioner Kyriakides

- As regards animal health and welfare, which is one of the elements contributing to the sustainability of global livestock, I am glad to note that the Pigmeat Reflection Group recommendations highlight the issues that

¹ Half of Cluster 6 projects in 2021-2022 calls and 41% of 2023 Cluster 6 topics are „multi-actor approach” (MAA)

have been also identified by the Commission as an integral part of the sustainability agenda.

- I have already transmitted all recommendations of the Group to my Colleague Commissioner Kyriakides. The Group's voice comes timely in the ongoing work on a comprehensive revision of animal welfare legislation. Legislative proposals are planned for the end of this year.
- We are all aware of how African swine fever (ASF) has impacted the pig sector, and of the need to support research and innovation for prevention and eradication of this disease, including the development of a vaccine. Results of past and ongoing EU funded research, such as VACDIVA and DEFEND, and of other international projects on ASF look promising. In Horizon Europe work programme 2023-2024 we have additional funds foreseen for research projects that will improve the capacity to develop ASF pilot vaccines and vaccination strategies for both wild boar and domestic pigs and for increased international cooperation on a possible ASF vaccine. Improve public-private collaborations and increase investments on R&I on vaccine development is fundamental.
- Vaccination, however, cannot be the only measure for eradication of the disease and the Group is indeed calling for continuous support to other best practises such as proper biosecurity and wild boar management. Furthermore, good housing, husbandry and nutrition, are the basis for healthy animals and reduce the need to treat with antibiotics, ensure sustainability and contribute also to maintaining good human. Two projects focussed on biosecurity started recently (Bio-SECURE; HE-Farm), addressing pigs among other livestock.
- In addition to pig health, the Group recognises the need to ensure that pigs are protected at any stage of the production process, including on farm, transport and slaughter.
- The Group's call to use all tools available to improve animal-friendly practises in the pig sector resonates with the Green Deal and the Farm to Fork Strategy. Those practises should be based on scientific evidence and continued research on the welfare needs of pigs.
- Animal welfare is one of the objectives of the CAP and I can command all Member States for having recognised the importance of animal welfare in their CAP Strategic Plans. At least EUR 7 billion will be dedicated to improving animal welfare and health with a wide range of commitments according to species and husbandry systems. As regards to pigs' tail docking practises, Commission suggested support to enlarge living space by at least 20%, or combine an increase in space - ranging from 15% to

20% - with other actions that improve housing conditions (enriched material, and microclimate control).

- And lastly, I concur with the Group that efforts must continue to raise awareness and promote a common understanding on animal health and animal welfare rules with third countries.
- I count on the other addressees of the Group's report to do their share to make the best out of the Group's work and accompany the pig sector towards always more sustainability.