EU Meat Market Observatory

European Commission

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27 February 2024

- The 24th meeting of the EU Meat Market Observatory (Meat MO) took place on 27 February 2024, with the participation of experts from the meat supply chain.
- The European Commission presented the most recent beef and veal as well as pigmeat market data (Annexes 1 and 2).
- For the beef market, the Meat MO confirmed a production decline in 2023 and herd reduction as indicated by the Eurostat survey of June 2023. Prices remain stable at a high level. Such high prices and the moderation of feed prices have allowed margins to improve. The Meat MO also noted that, overall, while trade volumes decreased in 2023, the value of traded products increased, and the EU trade balance remains largely positive.
- The Meat MO acknowledged the stability of the EU beef market but expressed concerns on the discouragement and disengagement of producers in a context of uncertainty about EU policies that could impact the sector and about the impact of current and future market openings following FTA agreements.
- For the pigmeat market, the EU Meat MO noted that there is a strong decline in production, with reductions across nearly all EU Member States. After several months of stability, pig carcass prices are trending up again. Piglet prices are further improving. Both continue above the historical average of the last five years. On international trade, the Meat MO noted decreased pigmeat exports towards most third country destinations, the UK being an important exception.
- Participants underlined the need for balanced policy-making given the economic, regulatory, and environmental pressure, to ensure pig farming future prospects, support domestic production and maintain food security in the face of declining production and increasing global competition.
- Eurocommerce’s presentation (Annex 3) showed that inflation in the EU has been steadily declining since October 2023 and is now stable around 3% (with important differences between Member States). Food inflation peaked later than general inflation and still remains higher, although decreasing. Despite lower inflation levels in the second part of 2023, the cost-of-living crisis continues to be a major concern for European consumers. Consumers have responded to high prices by downtrading.
- In the second half of 2023 there have been some increases in sales volume at retail level for certain types of meat in some Member States. However, there continues to be a general decline in volumes of retail sales for meat products; consumer attitudes towards different types of meat also change, with consumers looking for healthier options, for instance by buying more poultry (because they perceive poultry as healthier than e.g. pork).
- CLITRAVI gave an overview of the main challenges faced by the meat processing industry in the European Union's broader economic and regulatory landscape. A call was made for a more cohesive and supportive EU policy framework that recognizes the interconnection of health, economy, and the meat supply chain, aiming to address the industry's current challenges such as high working costs and pressure on prices and ensure its sustainability.
- IDELE presented trends in meat consumption in France (Annex 4), highlighting a shift from beef and veal to poultry due to factors such as changing consumer preferences. Pork consumption is also slowly declining. Consumer attitudes towards beef a include perceptions of beef being difficult to cook, more expensive, and having a larger environmental and health impact. However, beef maintains popularity due to its convenience in forms like minced beef, its nutritional value, and its presence in the food service sector, which is growing compared to household consumption. Overall, the reduction in beef and veal consumption is slow, and it is slower than that of production.
- The broader European context shows varying responses to economic crises in terms of beef consumption across different countries, with a general trend towards cheaper products. The food service sector's share of beef consumption is increasing, suggesting a shift in where and how beef is consumed.