Dear Minister,

Thank you for your letter of 28 June 2023 in which you inform me about the adverse weather conditions in Latvia, including spring frosts and a prolonged period of drought, causing difficulties for farmers and the entire agricultural sector. You ask the Commission to consider further measures to facilitate farmers’ access to fodder. In particular, you ask the Commission to allow farmers to use flexibly their available arable land in 2024 by prolonging the derogations from application of GAEC 7 on crop rotation and GAEC 8 on use of fallow land for crop production. You also request that Member States be allowed to derogate in 2023 from eco-scheme and agri-environmental intervention conditions set out in their CAP Strategic Plans in order to authorise grazing and fodder production, and that the Commission approves rapidly related Plan amendments.

Firstly, let me assure you that the Commission and I personally take the adverse weather events affecting Latvia and other Member States very seriously. Since several years, the Commission services have been closely monitoring the worrying meteorological conditions in large areas of the EU, as well as their effects on crops and related market developments and decided to address such situations by identifying appropriate instruments within the CAP and proposing different solutions to MS.

I am afraid that climate change will further exacerbate the difficulties you signal in Latvia and the EU as a whole since adverse weather episodes are likely to increase both in terms of frequency and magnitude. This is why current ways of producing food need to undergo the transition towards a resilient and sustainable farming sector, to preserve farming and guarantee food security in a changing climate. It is therefore vital to develop robust long-term strategies to equip the farming sector to adapt to the new climate conditions and buffer their adverse economic impact. The new CAP offers a tool-box of elements that can be used to support such strategies and I hope that you will make the most out of the available tools, working in synergy with national and other EU support.

Mr Didzis Šmits
Minister for Agriculture
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That said, further to your request and those of many other Member States, the Commission assessed a range of measures that could be used in the short term to support farmers in these difficult moments.

As I announced at the May Agrifish Council meeting and confirmed at the meetings on 27 June and 25 July, the Commission has prepared a package of short-term measures that Member States affected by adverse weather conditions may apply:

- Exceptional support of EUR 330 million from the CAP budget for 22 Member States, which they may complement up to 200% with national funds. The funding earmarked for Latvia amounts to EUR 6.8 million and takes into account the difficulties you signalled. The relevant proposal was adopted on 14 July.

- Increased percentages of advance payments for area-and animal-based support under both pillars of the CAP.

- Flexibilities in the sectorial programmes for fruit and vegetables and the wine sector.

- Exceptional amendments of the CAP Strategic Plans that would not count towards the maximum number of requests set in Article 119 of the Strategic Plan Regulation (Regulation (EU) 2021/2115) and which could be used, for instance, to reinforce the budget for investments to re-establish production potential e.g. destroyed crops, loss of farm animals, damaged buildings, machinery and infrastructure.

- Amendments of the current Rural Development Programmes that could channel uncommitted funds for similar purposes.

Furthermore, Latvian authorities could consider the use of the force majeure clause which would allow affected farmers to retain the right to receive aid, if the non-compliance with the condition for the granting of the aid is due to a recognised case of force majeure.

The above package of measures and the derogations for GAEC 7 and 8 already in place for 2023 should go a long way in helping you address the situation you face.

Regarding your specific requests, while we continue monitoring very closely the impact of droughts and other adverse weather conditions, it remains important that we address such challenges by means which will not negatively impact the contribution to the green objectives because many elements of the green architecture are precisely needed to help farmers to adapt and increase their resilience in the face of the higher frequency of extreme weather events.

Yours faithfully,

Janusz Wojciechowski