Mr Janusz Wojciechowski  
European Commission  
Commissioner for Agriculture  

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*Regarding the damage caused by drought and frost to Latvian agriculture and urgent measures to stabilise the situation*

Dear Commissioner,

Thank you, Commissioner, for your active communication on the latest developments in Latvia's agricultural and market sector.

In addition to the data and analysis sent to the European Commission on 24 May regarding the difficulties in the cereals and rapeseed sectors in Latvia, I would like to draw your attention to the adverse weather conditions, drought and frost, in spring and early summer this year, negatively affecting arable farming and livestock sector, as well as to provide information on the losses caused by these adverse weather conditions.

In 2018, Latvia's crop and livestock farmers already experienced a drought that had a negative impact on their farming operations. Current preliminary analysis and forecasts show that this year's drought and frost will affect all agricultural sectors and will cause even greater losses than those experienced in 2018.

The drought has had irreversible and serious consequences for all agricultural sectors, including cereals, oilseeds, legumes, vegetables and fruits, with negative effects on the sowing, germination and development of crops. Moisture deficit has already been observed since April, when total rainfall in Latvia was 20.3 mm, 43 % below what is the norm for the month (35.8 mm), and the drought continued in May. Total rainfall in Latvia in May was 12.2 mm, i.e. 76 % below the monthly norm (50.4 mm). This May became the driest in observation history (since 1924), exceeding the previous record registered in 1941 by 2.2 mm. According to the latest data from the Latvian Environment, Geology and Meteorology Centre, the drought continued into the first decade of June, and the total rainfall in Latvia was 3.3 mm, which is 79 % below the decade norm (15.5 mm).

On lighter soils, visual signs of moisture deficiency are already visible. Moisture deficit is very crucial and will therefore have an impact on yields, and if the forecasts of continued low rainfall materialize, yield losses will be significant and also partly irreversible.

The preliminary results of the winter yield forecasting exercise show that among all winter crops, winter wheat (-11 %) and winter barley (-17 %) are expected to show the highest yield reductions (t/ha) compared to 2022 yields. Winter wheat is currently experiencing hasty vegetation. The plant develops only the central stems without forming productive lateral shoots, due to the lack of use of plant nutrients under drought conditions, resulting in a low total number of productive stems and thinning of the crop. The Latvian Rural Advisory and Training Centre forecasts that the reduction in winter wheat yields (t/ha) could be as much as 30 % under these conditions. The yield potential may
be further significantly affected by the moisture supply at the time of grain formation, when the lack of moisture may result in small, poor quality grains. As winter wheat is the most important cereal crop in Latvia, accounting for 51% of the area sown in 2020, 55% in 2021 and 58% in 2022 - such reduction in total yield will further worsen the already problematic situation of Latvia’s cereal producers.

Reduced crop yields will have a negative impact on farm incomes and ability of farms to cover their management and commitment costs. In turn, low forage crop yields significantly increase the cost of forage preparation. The prolonged drought this spring and early summer delayed grassland development across the whole of Latvia. As a result of the lack of moisture, grass in grassland fields went into temporary anaebiosis (the cessation of life processes in the plant). The lack of humidity contributed to grasses maturing (flowering) more quickly, resulting in a lack of green mass. As a result of the prolonged drought, the grassland is unable to absorb the nutrients, which under normal moisture conditions would ensure the formation of a grass mass. Farms are already experiencing difficulties and an acute shortage of working capital, and the financial difficulties of farms are compounded by the losses incurred and not covered in the past due to both the significant increase in input prices and the reduced income due to the fall in finished product prices (detailed analysis and information were provided on 24 May).

In addition, Latvian fruit growers suffered significantly from the spring frost damage this spring. Orchards in all regions of Latvia suffered. This spring, Latvia experienced one of the worst spring frosts in recent years and it is forecasted that most of the harvest will be lost. A survey is currently being carried out to determine the exact extent of the damage.

With early indications of drought and frost damage as well as the reduced agricultural output already experienced in 2018 as a result of drought, Latvia is concerned that the effects of this year’s drought and frost will have irreversible and serious consequences for the crop and livestock sectors. The reduction in total revenue for these sectors could reach EUR 301 million, based on the projected reduction in sectoral output and the increase in feed costs in 2023 as compared to the average of the sectoral output and feed costs for livestock sectors in the period 2019-2022.

Please note that the situation is still under active assessment and the damage estimates are still to be finalised.

Considering the aforementioned circumstances and to assist farmers in overcoming them, I urge for the approval of derogations in the Common Agricultural Policy Strategic Plan for the intervention LA10.1 "Green Strips", allowing multiple mowings to provide additional opportunities for fodder production and permitting grazing in these areas.

To alleviate the burden of financial difficulties on farms, I kindly request the preparation of necessary decisions that would allow farmers to flexibly utilize their available arable land in 2024, providing exemptions from the application of GAEC standard 7 on crop rotation and allowing fallow land established to meet GAEC standard 8 to be used for crop production.

In order to facilitate the availability of fodder, preparation of which is threatened by prolonged drought, please provide in 2023 an option to use for grazing or fodder production areas of land lying fallow, green manure areas, buffer strips and field margins declared for the fulfilment of the GAEC 8 standard and declared for ecoscheme support.

Additionally, I kindly request the authorization for Member States to utilize land lying fallow, green manure, catch crops areas and buffer strips declared for support under eco-schemes and agri-
environmental measures for grazing or fodder production, while retaining their eligibility for eco-scheme and agri-environmental support in order to mitigate the negative impact of adverse weather conditions on farmers' revenue and viability.

I would like to express my gratitude to the Commission for intention to provide an opportunity to grant higher rates of advance payments for direct payments and rural development interventions and I count on your understanding of the difficulties facing the Latvian agricultural sector and the need to stabilise the situation in order to maintain the resilience of the agricultural sector in 2023.

Please accept the assurance of my highest consideration.

Attached: the information on weather conditions in Latvia from April to the first decade of June 2023.

Sincerely,
Didzis Šmits
Minister of Agriculture
Annex

Situation with weather conditions in Latvia from April to the first decade of June 2023

This year, we witness particularly unfavorable weather conditions for agriculture all over the territory of Latvia.

April
Since the beginning of April, there is a high air temperature and drought almost in the entire territory of Latvia. According to the data of the Latvian Environment, Geology and Meteorology Center (LVGMC), April 2023 together with April of 1990 and 1950 was the 5th warmest in the history of weather observations (since 1924). Also, the total amount of precipitations in April was 20.3 mm that is 43% below the monthly norm (35.8 mm).

May
In May, the average air temperature in Latvia was +11.3 °C that is by 0.1 °C below the monthly norm. May began with a wave of frost particularly in the period from May 5 to 8, 2023 there were freezing temperatures, reaching -6.8 °C in some places. Frost, mainly on soil surface, was also observed in many places at the end of month. At the beginning of May, in most of the territory, rapeseed, cherries,
plums and bird-cherrys were in blossoms. In second and third decade of May, apple-trees and rowan-trees were blossoming in the entire territory of Latvia.

In May the total amount of precipitations, in Latvia was 12.2 mm that is by 76 % below monthly norm (50.4 mm). Thus, May of this year became the driest in the history of observations (since 1924), breaking the previous record by 2.2 mm, registered in 1941. The most of precipitations (28.1 mm) was in Rēzekne, but the least in Rūjiena – 7 mm. In average, in May there were 2.1 days when the amount of precipitations was at least 1 mm, in Latvia. The most of such days was in Dagda, Gulbene, Rēzekna and Skrīveri – 4 days, but the least in Ainaži, Bauska, Dobele, Jelgava, Kalnciemis, Kuldīga, Riga, Rūjiena, Salds, Skulte, Stende and Zosēni - 1 day and night.
Both frost and lasting draught are affecting negatively both spring and winter cereals as well as fruit trees, berry bushes and vegetables. All this raises farmers’ concerns. Lasting draught poses high fire risks in forests, particularly in western and central regions but in Zemgale and Vidzeme fire hazard is particularly high.

1st decade of June

In the first decade of June, the average air temperature in Latvia was +12.7 °C, that is by 2.0 °C below the decadal norm. The maximum temperature of the decade was +27.3 °C on 8 June in Daugavpils, while the minimum temperature was -2.4 °C on 2 June in Stende, a new Latvian record for the minimum temperature on 2 June.

Temperatures in early June were mostly below normal, especially in the first few days of the month, and a total of 5 daily minimum temperature records were broken in the first decade of June. The prolonged anticyclones had a strong influence on the diurnal air temperature ranges, with an average difference of 12.2 °C between the daily minimum and maximum temperatures in Latvia during the first ten days of June, and as high as 22 °C (+2.7 °C to +24.7 °C) in Rucava on 7 June. This was also the reason for the unusual situation that on 6 June a daily minimum air temperature record was recorded in Liepāja, while the average daily temperature in Latvia was warmer than normal.

In the first decade of June Latvia’s the total amount of precipitations in Latvia was 3.3 mm that is by 79 % below the decadal normal (15.5 mm), becoming as the driest start to June since 2018. The most of precipitations (13.3 mm) was recorded in Priekuli, while Dobele, Liepāja and Rucava did not receive even 0.1 mm of precipitation. On average in Latvia, there were 0.9 days with at least 1 mm of precipitation in the first decade of June. The highest number of such days was in Zoseni - 3 days, while Dobele, Jelgava, Liepāja, Mērsrags, Pāvilosta, Rucava, Saldu, Stende and Vičaki had no such days.
**Vidējās gaisa temperatūrās novirze no normas (1991.-2020.g.)**
2023. gada jūnija 1. dekāde, °C
* novirze no 1991.-2020. gada ilggadīgās vidējās vērtibās

Deviation of average air temperature from the norm (1991-2020) in 1st decade of June 2023, °C
* deviation from a long-term average value of 1991-2020

**Nakrišņu daudzuma novirze no normas (1991.-2020.g.)**
2023. gada jūnija 1. dekāde, %
* novirze no 1991.-2020. gada ilggadīgās nakrišņu vērtibās
* nakrišņu mērs, vai to bija mazāk par 0,1 mm

Deviation of amount of precipitations from the norm (1991-2020) in 1st decade of June 2023, %
* deviation from a long-term average value of 1991-2020