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Mr Janusz Wojciechowski
Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development
Rue de la Loi 200
BE - 1049 Brussels

Brussels, 7 July 2023

RE: flexibilities and derogations from CAP requirements for 2023 and 2024

Dear Commissioner,

The severe weather conditions have been impacting the agricultural sector in the entire EU for some time now. The continuous lack of precipitation or severe floods have dried up winter crops, impacted grass production, delayed or prevented the cultivation of Spring/Summer crops. This has led to significant crop losses, lower yields, loss of harvest and less feed availability, negatively impacting the livestock sector.

These difficulties come on top of those experienced by farmers as a result of impacts of the Russian war in Ukraine, the rise in energy and input prices, and inflation.

The effect of these extreme weather conditions is evident and, in many situations, makes it impossible for farmers to comply with some of the conditionality and/or eco-schemes and agro-environmental and climate requirements. For example, in Lithuania, farmers are unable to ensure that established catch crops or undersown grass will sprout due to the drought which makes it impossible to comply with the eco-scheme requirement. Farmers are thus faced with a dilemma - to reduce the number of animals (already low) or to mow cereals preparing roughage for the winter. The same situation can be found in Latvia. In Belgium-Flanders, the late sowing of crops is likely to have an impact on crop rotation due to feed availability or late harvest or on soil coverage in winter. In Austria, the late cultivation of summer crops impacts certain agro-environmental and climate measures (e.g. cultivation dates or maximum periods with bare soil between tillage and crop cultivation). In Spain and Portugal, the shortage of pasture and the cost of feed have led to the reduction of livestock numbers, making it difficult to meet minimum stocking rates. Because of drought, land has to be tilled to avoid compaction. In Sweden, Spring sown crops as well as grass production and crops on lighter soils are both quite severely impacted. Thus cereal production is expected to be down, the first grass harvest is about 50% of a normal year with great variations (10-90%), forage for livestock is problematic. In France, destroyed crops because of heat peaks/hail/hurricanes may endanger access to some eco-schemes and there is an issue with burned pastures in Natura 2000 areas. And there are many more similar examples from other Member States.
With the impact of these extreme weather conditions, many farmers might be risking their access to CAP support. While the European Commission has shown openness to address these difficulties via changes in the CAP National Strategic Plans on a case-by-case approach which could bring some relief, this is by far not sufficient to address the full extent of these impacts. Farmers need immediate certainty (as from early September at the latest) about the rules to be applied and a level playing field. Therefore, we call on the European Commission to use adequate flexibilities in the CAP for 2023 and adopt derogations at EU level from conditionality requirements and eco-schemes as well as agro-environmental requirements for 2024 to prevent further economic losses for farmers already suffering.

During the last Agriculture and Fisheries Council meeting, there was a strong support for derogations from conditionality requirements for next year which Copa-Cogeca fully support.

Finally, this must be seen as a temporary response to a situation which farmers have no control of. Farmers and their cooperatives will continue their efforts towards more sustainable production methods and systems.

Thank you very much for considering our concerns.

Yours faithfully,

Christiane Lambert
President of Copa

Ramon Armengol
President of Cogeca