

## **Agriculture and Fisheries Council** **Luxembourg, 25 April 2023**

The Agriculture and Fisheries Council will be held on **Tuesday 25 April** in Luxembourg, starting at **10.00 am**. The session will be chaired by the Swedish Minister for Rural Affairs, **Peter Kullgren**. The European Commission will be represented by the Commissioner for Agriculture, **Janusz Wojciechowski**, and the Commissioner for Health and Food Safety, **Stella Kyriakides**.

In the morning, following the adoption of A items, ministers will hold a public discussion on the agricultural and forestry aspects of the proposed regulation on the **certification of carbon removals**. The afternoon will start with a discussion on the **market situation for agricultural products**. This will be followed by public sessions on the state of play of the **CAP strategic plans**, and the approval of Council conclusions on the **bioeconomy**.

During the day, under **other business**, the Council will receive information from the Commission on biological control agents. Delegations will also provide information on topics including the sustainable use of pesticides regulation, PFAS in foodstuffs, imports from Ukraine, issues in the dairy sector, and the honey directive.

Over an informal lunch, ministers will discuss the upcoming proposal on new genomic techniques.

A **press conference** with Commissioner Wojciechowski will take place following the meeting, at around **19.45**.

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[Agriculture and Fisheries Council - Meetings page](#)

[Press conferences and public events by video transmission](#)

[Video transmission, downloadable in 'broadcast' format \(MPEG4\), and photo gallery](#)

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<sup>1</sup> This note was written under the responsibility of the press office.

## Agriculture

### Regulation on the certification of carbon removals: agricultural and forestry aspects

*Item to be taken in public session*

Based on information from the Commission, ministers will hold a policy debate on the agricultural and forestry aspects of the proposed regulation on the certification of carbon removals.

Following the adoption of Council Conclusions on carbon farming in April 2022, on 30 November 2022 the Commission published a proposal to establish a voluntary certification framework for carbon removals at EU level. The aim is to help achieve the EU's climate, environmental and zero-pollution goals by absorbing CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere and storing it long-term. Given the impossibility of eliminating carbon emissions entirely, the only way for the EU to reach its goal of becoming carbon neutral by 2050 is by also focussing its efforts on carbon removal and storage.

Farmers and forest managers can play a key role in trapping and storing carbon by adopting practices that:

- enhance carbon capture in soils and forests, such as agro-forestry, forest restoration, catch crops and better soil management; or
- reduce the release of carbon from soils to the atmosphere, such as restoring peatland

The Commission's proposal aims to incentivise farmers and foresters to engage in carbon farming and sets out rules for verifying carbon removals, based on criteria such as sustainability, long-term storage and accurate measuring.

While the approval of the proposed regulation on the certification of carbon removals falls within the remit of the Environment Council, the policy debate between agriculture ministers is expected to feed into the work currently taking place on this proposal.

[Regulation on the certification of carbon removals: agricultural and forestry aspects – information from the Commission](#)

[Proposal for a regulation establishing a Union certification framework for carbon removals](#)

### Opportunities of the bioeconomy in the light of current challenges

*Item to be taken in public session*

The Council will approve conclusions on the opportunities provided by the bioeconomy in the light of current challenges, with a focus on rural areas.

The conclusions follow on from the guidance provided by the European Council in March on the need to “foster the transition towards a more circular economy to improve sustainability [...] including by seizing the opportunities offered by the bioeconomy”. They aim to provide political guidance to the Commission and member states on further developing the bioeconomy. During the meeting, ministers will have the opportunity to further highlight their priorities and air any concerns on the future development of the bioeconomy.

“Bioeconomy” refers to the use of renewable biological resources from land and sea, such as crops, forest products, fish, animals and micro-organisms, to produce food, materials and energy. It can contribute to the development of a circular and low-carbon economy by helping to modernise and strengthen the EU's industrial base, create new value chains and greener, more cost-effective industrial processes, while also protecting biodiversity and the environment.

In 2018 the Commission updated its EU Bioeconomy Strategy, which sets out ways to speed up the development of a sustainable and circular EU bioeconomy, which is crucial if the EU is to

achieve its aims under the European Green Deal and related strategies. As a result, the Council asked the Commission to prepare a progress report on its implementation, which it published in 2022.

In its conclusions, the Council invites the Commission to update its Bioeconomy Strategy and the related action plan. Other points raised in the conclusions include:

- the role of a sustainable circular bioeconomy in addressing the EU's current challenges, especially climate change, biodiversity loss, high energy prices and food security
- the economic benefits of the bioeconomy, in particular as regards providing essential products, increasing competitiveness, diversifying income and creating jobs (including for young people) in rural and coastal areas
- the bioeconomy's contribution to increasing resilience and transitioning away from fossil fuels
- the need to ensure consistency with relevant policy areas
- the opportunities of the bioeconomy for boosting innovation and development in rural areas and providing diversified incomes for farmers and other rural stakeholders
- the potential of agri-food waste for producing alternative bio-based resources

[Draft Council conclusions on the opportunities of the bioeconomy in the light of current challenges with special emphasis on rural areas](#)

[Council Conclusions on the EU Bioeconomy Strategy](#)

### **CAP strategic plans: state of play**

*Item to be taken in public session*

Based on information from the Commission, ministers will exchange views on the state of play of member states' strategic plans under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) for 2023-2027.

Under the most recent reform of the CAP, concluded in 2021, EU countries drafted strategic plans setting out how they will implement the EU's farming policy at national and regional level. The aim of the plans is to enable member states to adapt the provisions of the CAP to their particular needs and circumstances.

In 2022 the Commission carried out a full evaluation of the strategic plans submitted by member states, based on their fulfilment of the CAP's objectives and alignment with the goals of the European Green Deal. The final approved plans came into force in January 2023.

[CAP strategic plans – information from the presidency](#)

### **Market situation in particular following the invasion of Ukraine**

Based on information provided by the Commission and member states, the Council will take stock of the market situation for agrifood products in the EU, with a particular focus on imports of Ukrainian cereals.

While Russia's invasion of Ukraine in March 2022 has not threatened food security in Europe, its impact on the EU's agricultural sector is ongoing. A number of measures have been put in place over the past year to allow Ukraine to continue to export agrifood products. These include:

- solidarity lanes established by the EU in May 2022 to help transport food exports by land
- the introduction of autonomous trade measures (ATMs) in June 2022 to suspend import duties, quotas and trade defence measures on Ukrainian exports to the EU

- the Black Sea Grain Initiative brokered by the UN and Türkiye in July 2022 and renewed in March 2023 to restore sea routes by opening a safe corridor in the Black Sea

On 23 February 2023 the Commission adopted a proposal to renew the ATM for another year; the proposal is currently being considered by the Council and the European Parliament. The Black Sea Grain Initiative was extended in March 2023.

While trade liberalisation and overland solidarity lanes are essential to supporting Ukraine's economy, they have led to market disturbances in neighbouring countries due to a sharp rise in imports of cereals and oilseed products intended for western Europe and non-EU countries. On 20 March 2023 the Commission presented a new support measure worth €56.3 million to support farmers in Bulgaria, Poland and Romania. Following the announcement by the Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen, in the European Council on 23 March, the Commission is working on a second package of measures worth €100 million. In mid-April 2023 a number of member states announced their decision to introduce a temporary ban on cereal imports from Ukraine.

Other business items on actions to be taken to counteract market disturbances, a proposal to mitigate the impact of Ukrainian imports on EU markets, and the joint purchasing of Ukrainian cereals will be dealt with in conjunction with the item on the market situation.

[Market situation in particular following the invasion of Ukraine](#)

## **Other business**

### **Biological control agents**

*Item to be taken in public session*

The Commission will provide information on its study on the EU's situation and options regarding the introduction, production, evaluation, marketing and use of invertebrate biological control agents (IBCA's).

The study came about in response to a request from the Council (Council Decision (EU) 2021/1102) and was shared with the Council and the Parliament on 21 December 2022. It followed on from work begun under the Portuguese presidency in February 2021 to examine whether some degree of EU harmonisation could help promote IBCA's as an alternative to chemical pesticides, and if so to develop a legislative proposal to that effect. The Commission concluded that due the lack of quantitative data, it was unable to assess the added value of a possible EU intervention.

[Study on the Union's situation and options regarding the introduction, production, evaluation, marketing and use of invertebrate biocontrol agents \(IBCA's\) within the territory of the Union – presentation by the Commission](#)

### **Sustainable use of pesticides**

*Item to be taken in public session*

The Latvian delegation, on behalf of the Bulgarian, Czech, Hungarian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish, Romanian and Slovak delegations, will provide information related to concerns about the regulation on the sustainable use of plant protection products and maintenance of an adequate plant health status in the EU.

On 22 June 2022, the Commission published a proposal for a regulation on the sustainable use of "plant protection products" (pesticides). The proposed regulation sets legally binding targets at EU level for a 50% reduction in the use and risk of chemical pesticides and more hazardous pesticides by 2030. The proposal bans the use of all pesticides in sensitive areas, but otherwise allows

member states a certain amount of flexibility in setting binding national reduction targets, based on factors such as how much progress had already been made to reduce pesticide use.

In December 2022 the Council adopted a decision requesting the Commission to provide an additional impact study on the regulation by June 2023. In December 2022, the Council published a progress report on the ongoing discussions on the proposal.

[Concerns about draft legislative act on sustainable use of plant protection products and maintenance of an adequate plant health status in the EU – information from the Latvian delegation on behalf of the Bulgarian, Czech, Hungarian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish, Romanian and Slovak delegations](#)

[Proposal for a regulation on the sustainable use of plant protection products](#)

## **Honey directive**

*Item to be taken in public session*

The Slovenian delegation will provide information about the relevance of the Commission's report on the findings of the EU-wide coordinated action *From the hives* and its relevance for the revision of the EU Honey Directive (2001/110/EC).

According to the Commission's report, a significant part of honey imported from non-EU countries and placed on the EU market is suspected of not complying with the provisions of the directive, with 46% of imported honey samples revealed to be adulterated. The most common malpractices detected included the use of sugar syrups or additives and colourings, forging traceability information to mask the true geographical origin of honey, and adapting honey/sugar blends in laboratories to elude possible detection by authorities.

The Slovenian delegation calls on the Commission to take into account the findings of the report in negotiations on the upcoming revision of the honey directive.

[Commission's report on the findings of the EU coordinated action "From the hives" and its relevance for the revision of the Council Directive on honey – information from the Slovenian delegation](#)

["From the hives" report](#)

## **Continuing crisis in the dairy sector**

The Lithuanian and Latvian delegations will present information about the ongoing crisis in the dairy sector. This point will be taken jointly with the discussion on the market situation.

As a result of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, farmers and producers in Latvia and Lithuania are under increased pressure due to the significantly increased costs of inputs. While energy and feed costs have risen sharply, the purchase price of raw milk has been steadily declining. The delegations will therefore call on the Commission to introduce exceptional EU financial support to alleviate the situation in the dairy sector.

[Continuing crisis in the dairy sector – information from Lithuanian and Latvian delegations](#)

## **Mitigating the impact of imports from Ukraine on EU markets**

The Slovak delegation, supported by the Bulgarian, Hungarian, Polish and Romanian delegations, will provide information on a proposal aimed at mitigating the impact of imports from Ukraine on EU markets. This point will be taken jointly with the discussion on the market situation.

Increased imports of agricultural products from Ukraine via the solidarity lanes has caused market disturbances in neighbouring countries. In order to address the situation, the delegations propose

the establishment of an EU instrument via which grain would be purchased in cooperation with the World Food Programme (WFP) to reduce the pressure on EU member states' markets. According to the delegations, the instrument would help restore food trade flows and alleviate the impact of the invasion on non-EU countries.

[Proposal to mitigate the impact of imports from Ukraine on EU markets – information from the Slovak delegation, supported by the Bulgarian, Hungarian, Polish and Romanian delegations](#)

### **Other items**

Topics that will be discussed under “other business” also include the establishment of a lower level of PFAS in foodstuffs and actions to counter market disturbances caused by Ukrainian cereal imports,

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