



European Commission
Directorate-General for Agriculture
and Rural Development

Newsletter

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Mrs Fischer Boel takes up her duties



Mrs Mariann Fischer Boel succeeded Franz Fischler as Commissioner for agriculture and rural development on 22 November. Continuity is the keyword at the start of her term of office. After two sets of CAP reform in the past five years, her priority is ensuring that the new CAP beds down effectively. But she knows there are many other issues to be dealt with.

The Commissioner will ensure that the implementation of the CAP reform does not lead to distortions of competition and that the CAP is not 'renationalised'. But, as she stressed at her hearing before the European Parliament's Agriculture Committee on 6 October, Mrs Fischer Boel faces several other significant challenges.

Rural development

Commissioner Fischer Boel will place rural development at the heart of the EU's Lisbon strategy, to drive innovation, increased competitiveness and sustainability, and to help create new opportunities for young people. Policy in rural regions has a key role to play in this.

The new Commissioner has three priorities: increasing competitiveness, enhancing the environment via better land management and improving the quality of life in rural areas. At her Parliamentary hearing she restated her support for a multifunctional EU agricultural policy, saying, 'I do not favour an American agriculture model. I cannot accept depopulation of the European countryside. There has to be a place for the family-run farm.'

She also wants to ensure that the CAP (including its rural development 'second pillar') will be adequately funded. Mrs Fischer Boel will have an important part to play in the forthcoming Council debate on the financial perspective for the period from 2007 onwards.

Further CAP reform

While most sectors were included in the recent series of reforms, some were left for later. There will be a debate on the future of the EU sugar 'regime' over the coming months, and the Commission may draft proposals on the future of the market organisations for wine and for fruit and vegetables.

WTO talks

The new Commissioner will be chief EU negotiator in the continuing WTO Doha Development Agenda agricultural negotiations. The same applies to trade negotiations with third countries over bilateral and regional farm trade deals.

Further EU enlargement

The Commissioner knows that agriculture will be an important dossier in future enlargement discussions and that she will also be helping to prepare Bulgaria and Romania for accession in 2007. It will be important to ensure that there is sufficient room in the agricultural budget to cover future enlargements without jeopardising the CAP.

Emphasis on effective communications

Mrs Fischer Boel favours an open dialogue with the other EU institutions and with agricultural players, including producers, processors and consumers, as well as the EU's trade partners, especially developing countries.

She will give priority to improving communications with the general public as regards the CAP. She stresses that the Commission and the European Parliament should work together to explain better the benefits of the CAP. The latest Eurobarometer survey results will feed into this debate (see the October *Newsletter*, No 68, or http://europa.eu.int/comm/agriculture/survey/index_en.htm).

The Commissioner will also face such issues as organic farming, animal welfare and the use of genetically modified organisms.

Mrs Fischer Boel is no stranger to the Brussels agricultural scene, having served as Denmark's Minister for Food, Agriculture and Fisheries from November 2001 to August 2004. She chaired the Agriculture Council

in 2002. She has been a member of the Folketing since December 1990, chairing its Committee for Food, Agriculture and Fisheries (1994–98) and the Committee for Trade and Industry (1998–99).

Mrs Fischer Boel has direct personal experience with farming. She was raised on a farm and she lives on an agricultural holding run independently by her husband.

Court of Auditors' special reports on agriculture

The European Court of Auditors published (on 16 November) several special reports on agricultural and related issues⁽¹⁾. These cover the tobacco common market organisation ('regime'), operation of Sapard, management of the 2001 foot-and-mouth disease outbreak, and the EU's bovine identification database (SIRB).

Part of the Court's role as independent auditor of the collection and spending of EU funds is to publish reports informing EU citizens of its work and related achievements. The Court publishes several reports each year, including special reports on subjects of particular interest. The reports published on 16 November are of particular interest to the agricultural community, even if they do not all fall within the remit of the Agriculture and Rural Development DG. Some highlights follow.

The tobacco report (which comments on the situation from 1998 onwards) emerged shortly after the April 2004 Council agreement to reform the tobacco regime. Thus, its criticisms of the role of the regime in matching supply and demand for tobacco should not apply under the new regime, as direct payments to tobacco

growers will increasingly be decoupled from production. Indeed the Court welcomed the April reform.

The Sapard report covers the lifetime of the pre-accession aid system, examining activities from 1998 to May 2004 and use of its EUR 520 million annual budget. Despite delays in getting the system running, the Court found that aid had contributed greatly to preparing the administrations of the candidate countries for accession, and to assisting smaller rural enterprises.

There was an EU and international dimension to dealing with foot-and-mouth. The Court found that the Commission rapidly took the necessary emergency measures, in particular to prevent the disease spreading around the EU. It also helped the four affected countries fight the epidemic. Despite the scale of the outbreak it did not result in a wider crisis in the EU's food and livestock markets. Nevertheless, the Commission has conducted a review of relevant disease control measures.

The main point emerging from the Court's report on SIRB is that the system makes it possible to trace the movement of animals and protect both public and animal health (though improvements are still needed).

⁽¹⁾ More information can be found on the website of the Court of Auditors (http://www.eca.eu.int/index_en.htm).

Agriculture DG communicating the CAP

The new Commissioner and staff from the Agriculture and Rural Development DG will be actively engaged in explaining the CAP to a wide audience, in several different forums, early in 2005.

The first major agricultural and food show will be the international **Grüne Woche** held in Berlin from 21 to 30 January, with the Commissioner present and an Agriculture DG stand. The Commissioner will also attend the **Salon International d'Agriculture (SIA)**, which follows from 26 February to 6 March in Paris.

However, before either of these events, the Agriculture and Rural Development DG co-organised and participated in a conference for young farmers from all 25 Member States, hosted by the European Parliament in Strasbourg on 14 January. Entitled 'The CAP — new prospects for young farmers in Europe and beyond', the aim of the conference was to bring together leaders from the Commission and the Parliament, national players and farmers' organisations to discuss, *inter alia*, the WTO agricultural talks.

These events provide opportunities for debate among key players, consumers and the media about future agricultural policy. They also showcase EU farming and food and provide a means to communicate how policies and food produce are interlinked, and how rural activities are increasingly relevant to society more generally — a key message that the new Commissioner, Mrs Mariann Fischer Boel, wants to transmit.

The SIA event is particularly important in this respect. This year, in cooperation with the French government, the Commission is promoting EU enlargement. The Agriculture and Rural Development DG stand will include several interactive features and will be encircled by stands from all 10 new Member States. Visitors will be 'introduced' to the new countries and will be able to taste their produce, view examples of rural crafts, and listen to and watch their music and dancing.



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