



European Commission
Directorate-General for Agriculture

Newsletter

ISSN 1560-1862

Farewell Franz Fischler

Franz Fischler's term of office as Commissioner with responsibility for agriculture, rural development and fisheries comes to an end on 31 October 2004. Having held the agriculture post over two Commission terms since 1995, he is the longest-serving Commissioner with responsibility for agriculture. During his tenure the EU's common agricultural policy (CAP) has seen the widest-ranging changes in its history.

Mr Fischler has always been committed to make EU farming more sustainable in economic, ecological and social terms. With responsibility for the drafting and implementation of agriculture and rural development policy, and for agricultural trade issues, he has been at the centre of political debates and decisions that will prove vital for the future of EU agriculture and for rural areas. These include:

- reforms to the CAP in 1999 (part of 'Agenda 2000') and in 2003/04;
- broadening of rural development and environmental aspects of the CAP;
- successful negotiation of the agricultural elements of the EU enlargement by 10 new Member States;
- securing a sustainable agriculture model in the WTO Doha Development round;
- preferential trade arrangements with many of the EU's trading partners, notably least-developed countries;
- strengthening of EU food safety policy;
- underpinning improvements in food quality.

(A full list of his achievements during his term of office can be found on the Internet (http://europa.eu.int/comm/agriculture/publi/achievements/text_en.pdf.)

The departing Commissioner will certainly be most remembered for the two CAP reform initiatives he instigated and carried through. These have fundamentally altered the policy, resulting in a CAP that is accepted by a large majority of EU society, is internationally recognised and which gives farmers and the farming sector a promising future. Mr Fischler has

ensured that farmers and other rural players have time to adapt to these fundamental changes, and that the future of the CAP and support to rural communities is clearly mapped out. He has also taken pains to explain the motives for reform, and the forthcoming changes, in order to provide reassurance, a sense of stability and a long-term perspective.

The Commissioner has been successful in not 'throwing the baby out with the bathwater'. While the CAP reforms of his time in office have been significant, he has succeeded in retaining the best of the CAP (for example ensuring stability of farm incomes and environmental and animal welfare standards) while strengthening and improving it. Apart from the 'headline events' of his office, the Commissioner will also be remembered for his able handling of crises that have arisen — be they animal diseases, floods, food scares or forest fires.

Mr Fischler was well known in Brussels before his arrival as Commissioner. He had been Minister of Agriculture for Austria for five years (1989–94), playing an important role in negotiating the agricultural terms for Austria's entry into the EU in 1995. A native of the Tyrol, a man who knows all about farming, who holds a doctorate in agricultural economics, he is eminently well qualified for the roles he has played in regional, national, EU and global agricultural policy.

A prominent feature of Mr Fischler's tenure has been his willingness to get out among his 'constituents', whether they be farmers, agri-business, the food industry, consumers or his political peers. This energetic activity is still evident in the last weeks of his term of office.

Mr Fischler will be succeeded as Commissioner with responsibility for agriculture and rural development on 1 November by Mrs Mariann Fischer Boel ⁽¹⁾. She is also well-known in Brussels agricultural circles, having served as Danish Minister for Food, Agriculture and Fisheries from 27 November 2001 to 2 August 2004. She chaired the Agriculture Council in the second half of 2002.

⁽¹⁾ Subject to approval by the European Parliament.

Reviewing the fruit and vegetables regime

In August, the Commission sent a report, prepared by the Agriculture DG, to the Council and European Parliament, intended to stimulate a debate about the future shape of the common market organisation ('regime') for fruit and vegetables⁽¹⁾. This has been followed by a more detailed analysis of the sector, in a working document that provides a solid background for the debate.

EU policy for the fruit and vegetables sector is continuously updated and is increasingly targeted at encouraging producers to be more market oriented. The economic objective of the regime is to encourage producers to group together in order to strengthen their position on the market.

The Commission's August report sets out the recent history of the regime, the changes made in 1996 and 2000 and the lessons that could be drawn from implementation of those changes. It draws on the immediate experience of the years 2002, 2003 and 2004. The working document covers:

- analysis of the key figures for the sector (trends in EU and world supply/demand and trade, and information on EU production structures and incomes);
- examination of budgetary issues;
- specific analysis of the operation of producer organisations (POs) — and related operational funds — major pillars of the regime.

Earlier Commission analysis (produced in 2001), advice from the Court of Auditors (annual report 2000) and the European Parliament (in February 2001), and a report prepared by the Spanish Council Presidency (also in 2001) stimulated a Council debate and conclusions in 2002. Those conclusions emphasised the need to give greater independence and responsibility to POs, to enhance their market management role, to promote POs in Member States where their role was weak, to simplify the regime and to encourage a policy of promoting high-quality products obtained under environment-friendly conditions.

Several changes have been made to the detailed operation of the fruit and vegetables regime during the period since 2000. The current Commission report poses strategic questions about the need for further reform, for example: how the role of POs can be strengthened; how to improve the grouping of supply in some regions (e.g. the new Member States) and product quality generally; what cross-compliance rules to apply in the sector; what can be done to ensure better crisis management; and how to ensure better use of the current budget.

The Commission is not presenting proposals to reform the regime further at this stage but will await the outcome of the Council and European Parliament debates.

⁽¹⁾ Covering fresh and processed fruit and vegetables, the citrus sector and nuts.

News in brief

□ The new Leader+ Observatory is being given a boost. It now has a bi-weekly publication ('Flash news'), and an official launch takes place on 25 October in Brussels at which representatives from local action groups (LAGs) will play a leading role.

The framework for the Leader+ Observatory was created in April 2000. It is run by the Commission but with an emphasis on local actors playing a leading role — in the overall spirit of the Leader initiative. The Commission offers a 'Contact point'⁽¹⁾ to enable all interested parties to be kept informed, and to inform each other, and to promote Leader+. The Commission is using several communication tools to facilitate contacts. One example is the Observatory's newsletter — 'Flash news' — which will be issued every two weeks. The first editions of 'Flash news' have already appeared on the Leader Internet website.

The Observatory's aims are, *inter alia*, to:

- collect and disseminate information about rural development initiatives and rural trends across the EU,
- share best practice in rural initiatives at local level,
- exchange expert advice with national and regional administrations,
- provide progress reports on the development and implementation of Leader+,
- organise meetings and other initiatives to encourage transnational contacts.

An example of such a meeting is the seminar on 25 October to launch the Leader+ Observatory. Particular issues under discussion will include access to services, participation to community life, improving the living environment, accessibility and the role of the Observatory.

⁽¹⁾ 81, Rue du Marteau, B-1000 Brussels.
Tel. (32-2) 235 20 20
Fax (32-2) 280 04 38
E-mail: Contact.point@leaderplus.org
Internet: <http://europa.eu.int/comm/agriculture/rur/leaderplus>

