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ORAL QUESTION (0-55/76)

with debate pursuant to Rule 47 of the Rules of Procedure

by Mr FELLERMAIER, Mr BROEKSZ, Mr CORONA, Sir Geoffrey de FREITAS, Mr ESPERSEN, Mr GIRAUD, Mr GLINNE and Mr HANSEN on behalf of the Socialist Group to the Commission of the European Communities

Subject : Consequences of the drought and protection of the consumer

The aim of the Treaty of Rome, as stated in Article 2, is to promote 'a harmonious development of economic activities'; further, making specific reference to the consumer, it lays down that the common agricultural policy should 'ensure that supplies reach consumers at reasonable prices.'

The long months of drought have caused market shortages of various products in the 'fruit and vegetables' sector, and this, linked to persistent inflationary trends, will probably lead to price rises in this sector to the disadvantage of the consumer. However, the Council, adopting an action programme for a consumer protection policy on 14 April 1975, showed its desire to implement an overall policy to defend the

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consumer's interests.

An initial measure was taken by the Commission when it decided to suspend the Common Customs Tariff from 30 August to 30 September 1976 for 5 products : carrots, peas, white and red cabbage, cauliflower and celery.

Since this decision was fairly limited in scope, would the Commission answer the following questions :

1. Does it feel that the suspension of the Common Customs Tariff on certain products for a short period is sufficient to guarantee Community supplies of fresh fruit and vegetables ?
2. Does it contemplate prolonging the suspension of the Common Customs Tariff beyond 30 September for the products already mentioned and also for potatoes if the market imbalance continues ?
3. Does it envisage extending the suspension of the Common Customs Tariff to other products in short supply, such as salad vegetables, cucumbers, beans and onions ?
4. Is not the Commission contemplating a policy of price cuts for fruit surpluses to benefit the consumer instead of disposing of it allegedly by distillation ?
5. Will the Commission take steps to combat the shortage of fodder affecting producers which threatens to interfere seriously with the production of and the market in animal products ? Wholesale cattle prices have already fallen to 84 % of the guide price.
6. Has it been in touch with consumers' associations to inform them and ask their opinion of the measures taken to combat the supply problems caused by the drought ?
7. What measures does the Commission intend taking to avoid the retail price increases that can be expected as a consequence of the poor harvest ?

Does it not at the same time contemplate stepping up coordination of the anti-inflationist policies implemented by the Member States of the Community ?