



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



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Extraordinary Council meeting

Agriculture

Luxembourg, 7 June 2011

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Main results of the Council

*During this extraordinary Council meeting, the agriculture ministers assessed the **food safety and market implications of the E. coli outbreak.***

*Finally, ministers were briefed on the **drought situation in Europe and the consequences for bovine farming.***

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¹ Where declarations, conclusions or resolutions have been formally adopted by the Council, this is indicated in the heading for the item concerned and the text is placed between quotation marks. Documents for which references are given in the text are available on the Council's Internet site (<http://www.consilium.europa.eu>). Acts adopted with statements for the Council minutes which may be released to the public are indicated by an asterisk; these statements are available on the Council's Internet site or may be obtained from the Press Office.

PARTICIPANTS

Belgium:

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Minister for SMEs, the Self-Employed, Agriculture and Science Policy

Mr Kris PETERS

Ministers-President of Flanders

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Minister of Public Works, Agriculture, Rural Affairs, Patrimony and Nature Policy

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Minister for Agriculture and Food

Czech Republic:

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Federal Minister of Food, Agriculture and Consumer Protection

Estonia:

Mr Gert ANTSU

Deputy Permanent Representative

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State Secretary for Rural Development and Food

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Ms Rosa AGUILAR RIVERO

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Mr Bruno LE MAIRE

Minister for Agriculture, Food and Fisheries, the Countryside and Land Use Planning

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Mr Henk BLEKER

State Secretary for Economic Affairs, Agriculture and Innovation

Austria:

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Federal Minister for Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management

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Slovenia:

Mr Dejan ŽIDAN

Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and Food

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Mr Zsolt SIMON

Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development

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Ms Sirkka-Liisa ANTTILA

Minister for Agriculture and Forestry

Sweden:

Mr Jan OLSSON

Deputy Permanent Representative

United Kingdom:

Lord HENLEY

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Commission:

Mr Dacian CIOLOȘ

Member

Mr John DALLI

Member

ITEMS DEBATED

E-Coli outbreak

Ministers evaluated the food safety and market implications of the recent outbreak of *E. coli* in the EU.

Concerning food safety, all member states deeply regretted the high number of fatalities due to the *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*) contamination in Germany. Several delegations pointed out the need to assess the current EU food safety system and improve the circulation of information between national food safety authorities and the quality of this information. As the source of contamination has not been clearly identified yet, many member states insisted on continuing investigations along the food chain to restore the confidence of consumers in vegetables mentioned as a possible source at the beginning of the outbreak. At the moment, the outbreak is mainly affecting people in northern Germany and people who have visited the region since the beginning of May.

The Commission recalled that all existing EU-wide networks to share information and to coordinate response has been activated immediately after the first cases were reported on 22 May. More specifically, the Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF) and the Early Warning and Response System for communicable diseases (EWRS) were used. However, the Commission intends to draw lessons from the current crisis for improving the current information systems if needed.

As regards the market implications, the vast majority of delegations expressed serious concerns about the situation of the fruits and vegetables sector at the national and EU level. They noted that producers were deeply affected by a crisis in which they had no responsibility at all. Considering the urgency of the crisis for several producing countries, some member states suggested that the Commission should use the provisions covering exceptional circumstances to compensate integrally all the producers affected by huge losses. However, several delegations refused to resort to national state aid in this case as it had been suggested by the Commission and insisted on a EU reply to a EU wide crisis.

Following the debate on the *E. coli* outbreak initiated by the Presidency at the informal Agriculture meeting in Debrecen, the Commission has decided to use the provision covering exceptional circumstances and partially compensate the huge losses of producers in this sector. It recalled that the budget for this action is limited. Considering the difficult situation of the fruit and vegetable sector, the Commission accepted to review its initial proposal and increase the compensation for the producers.

According to the current Common market organisation (CMO) for fruits and vegetables, measures in this sector are mainly under the responsibility of national producers organisations which can organise limited withdrawals, co-financed by the EU and the member states. In certain cases, national state aids can also be provided. Provisions covering exceptional circumstances are financed by the EU budget.

Considering the high number of deaths and also the economic weight of the recent outbreak of *Escherichia coli* in the EU, the Presidency convened this extraordinary meeting of the agriculture ministers. This meeting followed the Council on 6 June where the health ministers were briefed about the latest developments on this outbreak and the informal meeting of Agriculture ministers in Debrecen on 31 May where the subject was added to the agenda.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Drought situation in Europe

France supported by Belgium briefed the Council on the consequences of the drought situation in certain European countries in particular in the bovine sector (11111/11).

The French delegation mentioned in particular the decrease in yield foreseen for certain crops if the drought situation continues. It noted also that in addition several producer are now selling bovine animals they will not be able to feed in the future. This could have huge consequences for the bovine market in the long term.

On 17 May 2011, France supported by several delegations, voiced already concern about the current drought situation and consequent cash flow difficulties faced by farmers. The Commission was requested to bring forward the date of payment of the direct payments. In this context, many delegations also called for greater flexibility or a standard procedure on advance payments.

The Commission representative recalled that member states have the possibility to provide for advances of direct payments, provided that the respective checks have been carried out. At this occasion the Commission informed the Council of its intention to address in particular the problem faced by suckler cow farmers strongly affected by the drought.
