

COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT  
THE CHAIR

Mr Janusz Wojciechowski  
Commissioner for Agriculture  
European Commission  
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Dear Commissioner,

I would like to thank you again for your active and constructive participation in the exchange of views with ComAGRI Members on 15 April.

As you may recall, ComAGRI Members thanked the Commission for the initiatives already taken to support the agricultural sector, which currently faces unprecedented circumstances caused by the pandemic crisis that is hitting very hard the farmers in Europe.

We appreciated the publication of the Guidelines to resolve the transport problems for agri-food products as well as for seasonal workers in agriculture to facilitate their movement for work and the revised State Aid rules. However, not all Member States have properly implemented the Guidelines meaning that there remain obstacles to workers moving across borders and some Member States have not put in place measures to allow seasonal workers to start working immediately in another country and to do so safely. It is urgent that workers should be in place already for the ongoing spring seasonal work in many parts of the EU, and we ask a coordinated European action to support farmers in ensuring healthy and safe workplaces to protect all workers from the COVID-19 biohazard.

In addition, the Members expressed their appreciation for the initiatives taken to extend the deadline for submitting applications for direct payments and the introduced reductions and leeway in on-the-spot checks. We noted also that the Commission increased and sped up direct payments and payments from the second pillar for next year in such a way that farmers will receive 70% of their direct payments and 85% of their rural development payments already this year.

Dear Commissioner, without any doubts, all these measures will help farmers facing the current difficulties, but clearly they are not enough.

Among traditional agricultural sectors, those hit the most are dairy, meat, fruit and vegetable and wine, due to the closure of crucially important market outlets such as HoReCa. Nonetheless, the flower-growing sector is also facing significant problems, with the markets having almost entirely ground to a halt, and another severely affected sector is agri-tourism farming.

An increasing number of agricultural sectors are showing clear signs of market disruption and, while we recognise the European Commission and Member States' efforts to ensure smooth functioning of the internal market, we insist on the need for targeted market measures in the

agricultural sector, to tackle decreasing trends in market prices. Therefore, we ask the Commission to consider the activation of private storage aid and to encourage the use of the relevant supply management tools available under the CMO Regulation. Furthermore, we urge the activation of the exceptional measures to face market disturbance and periods of severe imbalance of the market, as foreseen in Articles 219, 221 and 222 of the CMO Regulation, as soon as possible. In order to tackle the problems in the fruits and vegetable sector, producer organisations should have maximum flexibility in the application of operational programmes. In the wine sector, a flexible application of the CMO instruments' could help but in view of the exceptional circumstances increased funding to the national envelopes is clearly needed.

ComAGRI Members called for the immediate mobilisation of the available budgetary margins under subheading 2 and, only after this, the deployment of the crisis reserve through which the Commission could make available up to €478 million after Parliament and Council approval. We are aware that releasing the crisis reserve ultimately means less money for direct payments, therefore we strongly urge the Commission to give high priority to allocate funds from outside the CAP budget to address the current crisis.

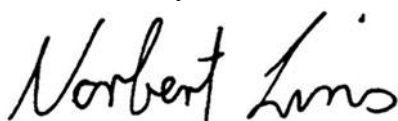
We appreciate your effort in providing Member States with more flexibility in the management of rural development programmes, but we need new and concrete tools, easy to implement, able to keep our farms alive. This flexibility must lead to compensation for the most affected farmers to ensure foregone income due to the pandemic. We already have a good example of this mechanism in Article 31 of the Rural Development Regulation, with payments to areas facing natural or other specific constraints. We suggest replicating these compensatory payments, differentiating them by the severity of the identified effects of the epidemic affecting farmers' income. A similar measure was already introduced through the modifications to the EMFF for fishermen and fish farmers, approved by the Parliament in the last Plenary session. However, as you yourself said, some Member States and regions implemented their Rural Development programmes in time and therefore have no uncommitted budgetary resources available to use in the new context. This could result in an unequal treatment of farmers across the EU unless a solution is found so that all affected farmers are supported.

This crisis has demonstrated the European Union's agri-food sector resilience and its capacity to continue providing our citizens with high quality and safe food. We can learn a lesson for the future on how to increase food security for European consumers together with economic security for farmers, and this lesson must include an adequate reallocation of resources for the CAP on the new MFF. We are waiting for a new MFF where the right consideration is given to agriculture policy, and we count on you to make it happen.

Dear Commissioner, this Parliament will support you to take swift initiatives to support our farmers that need significant help and they need it quickly.

The strength of the farming sectors expect an effective alliance by the institutions. It is our obligation to do so.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Norbert Lins". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Norbert LINS