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EuroFlash

***A monthly update on EU news from the
Cheshire Brussels Office***



International Unit

Agriculture and Rural Development

New programmes to promote dairy products

On the 19th January the European Commission approved €17.9 m co-financing of thirteen programmes in eleven member states, aimed at promoting the consumption of milk and milk products in the European Union. The total budget of the three year programmes is €35.8 m and is one of a set of measures proposed by the Commission in July 2009 to address the difficult market situation faced by the dairy sector. In accordance with the regulation on information provision and promotion measures for agricultural products in the internal market, the EU can finance up to 50% of these measures. The remaining budget is met by the professional or inter-branch organisations, which proposed the measures and/or by the member states concerned.

The countries concerned are the United Kingdom, Ireland, Bulgaria, Malta, Germany, Finland, France (three programmes), Italy, the Netherlands, Austria and Portugal.

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/10/34&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

ECO Budget for Farmers?

A report by the European Environmental Policy Institute, published on 25th January and financed by the EU, argues that budget increases and stricter compliance measures for the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) would help farmers to deliver "green public goods and services". In 2009, EU farm ministers first debated the concept of making public goods the focus of agricultural payments after 2013, but stressed that the concept needed to be properly defined before being discussed further.

The report examines the concept of public goods applied to agriculture, argues in favour of their delivery by farmers via public funding, and focuses on ten environmental public goods, of which the authors say there is evidence of "undersupply", and which have important interaction with agriculture. These include: agricultural landscapes, farmland biodiversity, water quality, water availability, soil functionality, carbon storage and climate stability, greenhouse gas emissions, air quality and resilience to fire and flooding. The report seeks to draw up a list of environmental public goods, including valued cultural landscapes, provided by Europe's farmers, farmland birds, and the species-rich meadows that are found across Europe. Farmers also manage the land for carbon storage and help to maintain high quality water and soils.

The Commission has indicated that the conclusions do not necessarily reflect its own opinion.

http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/analysis/external/public-goods/report_en.pdf

Agriculture can slow Climate Change

At a public hearing on 27th January of the Agriculture Committee, MEPs and scientists indicated that Agriculture can help to slow climate change, but should be ready to adapt to the impact of global warming.

"Agriculture can provide solutions for the future", given its direct relationship with the earth and living things, said Parliament's rapporteur report on agriculture and climate change Stephan Le Foll (S&D, FR). A new Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is therefore needed to take account of the impact of global warming and to mitigate climate change. "A new CAP", as "manager of the bio-sphere", would guarantee the transition to a new model of production and "ecologically, economically and socially efficient agriculture", he added.

The future CAP can help mitigate global warming mitigation in three ways: limiting its own greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, promoting carbon storage in the soil and producing sustainable and renewable energies, says Mr Le Foll's draft report.

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress_page/032-67968-025-01-05-904-20100125IPR67967-25-01-2010-2010-false/default_en.htm

http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/climate_change/index_en.htm

Hearings – Commissioners Designate

In the week 11th – 17th January a series of hearings was held as part of its approval procedure for the new European Commissioners. The term of office of the European Commission, the European Union's executive body, lasts five years and as the last 'College of Commissioners' was appointed in November 2004 it now has to be replaced.

Under the new Lisbon Treaty the Commission is composed of one national of each Member State i.e. 27 Members: a President and 26 Commissioners each in charge of a particular portfolio.

Parliament elects the candidate proposed by the European Council for President of the Commission. The reselection of Mr José Manuel Barroso for a second term was approved by Parliament on 16 September 2009. In a second stage, Parliament approves the whole Commission as a body.

Parliament evaluates the Commissioners-designate on the basis of their general competence, European commitment and personal independence. It also assesses their knowledge of the prospective portfolio and their communication skills and this is conducted on the basis of their CV, a series of questions and then each Commissioner-designate is invited to a three-hour public hearing with the parliamentary committee(s) responsible for the portfolio concerned.

As the Bulgarian Rumiana Jeleva, disaster management and humanitarian aid commissioner designate, failed to secure approval, Bulgaria's replacement nominee, Kristalina Georgieva, a vice-president of the World Bank, will have a hearing before MEPs on 3 February. The European Parliament will then vote on Jose Manuel Barroso's second team on 9 February. If the vote in is positive, the new Commission will be sworn into office the following day which is the eve of the extraordinary EU summit on the 2020 economic strategy, and just over three months after the end of the Barroso I Commission's mandate.

The first weekly meeting of commissioners will be held on 17 February.

Spanish Presidency

Citizen's Initiative

At an informal meeting of EU affairs ministers in La Granja on 13 January, the Spanish State Secretary for European Affairs Diego López Garrido indicated that there was support from all 27 member States to push forward a citizen's initiative. The Treaty of Lisbon, which entered into force on 1 December 2009, seeks to reinforce the democratic fabric of the European Union and one of its major innovations is to introduce the European citizens' initiative.

According to the Treaty, "not less than one million citizens who are nationals of a significant number of member states, may take the initiative of inviting the Commission, within the framework of its powers, to submit any appropriate proposal on matters where citizens consider that a legal act of the Union is required for the purpose of implementing the Treaties".

The European citizens' initiative (ECI) would therefore enable European citizens and civil society organisations to directly influence the political agenda of the EU for the first time in history.

Simplification of European Structural Funds

On the 25th January, during his visit to the European Parliament's Committee on Regional Development Carlos Ocana y Peres de Tudela, Spain's secretary of state for finance, indicated that simplifying the management and control of European Structural Funds is a priority for the Spanish Presidency. He indicated that the complexity of the control procedures leads to substantial delays between the time of execution of the expenditure and the time it is effectively reimbursed to the actors on the ground and that this was a "real problem," which obliges certain bodies to turn to other sources of financing.

Pledges on Gender Equality

On the 25th January at the meeting of the European Parliament's Committee on Women's Rights, Bibiana Aído Almagro, Spain's minister for equality, pledged to promote gender equality to create a fairer European model with more solidarity. She indicated that Madrid will push during its term at the Union's helm for progress with the antidiscrimination directive, which is currently under negotiation in Council.

In noting that women are still the main contributors to household and family care, the minister said these tasks should be divided more equally between men and women.

The Spanish Presidency will present to the Employment and Social Affairs Council, scheduled for 8-9 March and intends to create an EU observatory on gender violence that would collect data from all countries of the Union to improve awareness and understanding of this pressing problem.

Energy and Transport

European offshore wind installation up 54% in 2009

According to an analysis by the European Wind Energy Association, installation of offshore wind capacity grew 54%, to 577 MW which compares to the 373 MW of new capacity installed during 2008. 2009 saw a total of eight new wind farms comprised of 199 offshore wind turbines being connected to the grid in Europe, and foresees in 2010, the completion of ten additional European offshore wind farms. This will add 1,000 MW to the grid and represent a growth of 75% over 2009. The report notes that 17 offshore wind farms are currently under construction in Europe and this equates to over 3,500 MW; half of this new capacity is located in UK waters. Planning consent has also been given to a further 52 offshore wind farms, or over 16,000 MW, with just over half of this capacity planned in Germany.

[http://www.ewea.org/fileadmin/ewea_documents/documents/publications/reports/Pure Power_Full_Report.pdf](http://www.ewea.org/fileadmin/ewea_documents/documents/publications/reports/Pure_Power_Full_Report.pdf)

22 Marco Polo projects Approved

On the 27th January the EC approved 22 projects that will be co-funded by the Marco Polo programme, which supports the transfer of freight from road to more environmentally acceptable modes of transport. The projects, which the Commission hopes will bring about a transfer of 16.6 billion tonne/kilometres of road freight, will share a budget of €66.345 million. The Commission received 70 applications and in addition to the 22 projects selected, drew up a list of 17 projects that may receive Marco Polo support if additional funds can be released.

http://ec.europa.eu/transport/marcopolo/projects/docs/COM_Decision%202010_580.pdf

Economy

Financial sector shrinks by 6.2% in 2009

According to the European Commissions annually published European Financial Intergrateion report, the EU's financial sector is expected to have shrunk by 6.2% in 2009 in addition to the 0.3% fall in 2008. GDP contracted by around 4% last year after a 0.8% decline in 2008. The report states that profits have also been impacted by the crisis, with the average return on earnings down to 4.5% in 2008 from 19% in 2006.

The large banks were hardest hit, with large EU banks experienced higher losses than their American counterparts. The profitability of the European insurance sector deteriorated with returns averaging 3.9% of earnings in the life sector and 5.3% in the non-life sector in 2008 (down from 14.4% and 16.6%, respectively, in 2007).

http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/finances/docs/cross-sector/fin-integration/efir_report_2009_en.pdf

Economic confidence Grows

According to new Eurostat data the Economic Sentiment Indicator rose 4.1 points in December to 92 in the EU and was up 2.5 points to 91.3 in the eurozone. Meanwhile, the Business Climate Indicator, which measures eurozone managers' assessments of the business outlook, was -1.22 last December, up from -1.53 in November. In March last year it was -3.27.

Eurostat says that the increase in the business indicator "reflects an across-the-board improvement in managers' assessments," with the perception of the production trend and order books going up strongly.

http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/articles/eu_economic_situation/2010-01-07-economic-sentiment-indicator_en.htm

http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/db_indicators/surveys/index_en.htm

Structural Funds falling behind

On the 26th January Dirk Ahner, director-general of DG Regio, at the European Parliament's Committee on Regional Development, indicated that the implementation of programmes co-financed by the European Structural Funds for 2007-2013 was running behind schedule. Requests had been received for 30% of the available funds and these figures correspond to a delay of approximately one year in the programme implementation.

Environment- Copenhagen towards Mexico

From 7-18 December 2009, governments from 192 countries met in Copenhagen to secure an agreement to succeed the Kyoto Protocol, amid growing signals from scientists that global warming is occurring more quickly than expected. The document produced at the end, entitled the Copenhagen Accord, is a political accord agreed between a small group of global heads of state and government. It does not mention a long-term vision on emission reductions for 2050, nor does it include medium-term targets for 2020.

The deal sets an end January 2010 deadline for all nations to submit plans for curbing emissions to the United Nations.

On the 24th January four nations, led by China, pledged on Sunday to meet the deadline and challenged rich countries to come up with funding to help fight global warming. The Environment ministers and envoys from Brazil, South Africa, India and China met in New Delhi (countries which have greenhouse gas emissions among the fastest rising in the world) and they confirmed that they will disclose the voluntary steps they will take to help reduce global warming by the 31 January. They suggested that releasing \$10 billion this year would send a signal of the rich countries' commitment and indicated that they were in talks to set up an independent fund for the same purpose, but gave no timeline or figure. China has pledged to cut the amount of carbon dioxide produced for each unit of economic growth by 40-45% by 2020, compared with 2005 levels; for India, that figure is up to 25% by 2020 from 2005 levels.

On the 27th January at a meeting in Brussels, Ambassadors confirmed the 27 nation bloc's commitment to unilateral target carbon dioxide emissions to 20% below 1990 levels over the next decade, in a letter to be sent to the UN on 28th January, but that the 30% conditional offer should still be made.

The Timetable towards the 16th Conference of Parties in Mexico is;

31 JANUARY 2010. Deadline for countries to sign up to the Copenhagen Accord. Developing countries must declare to the UNFCCC their baseline Greenhouse Gas and reduction commitments to be achieved by 2020. Failure to meet the deadline will result in ineligibility to secure funding from the new \$30b fund donated by rich countries.

31 MAY to 10 JUNE 2010 Meeting of the government climate ministers at the UNFCCC headquarters in Bonn, Germany. The UN must determine a new negotiating process that does not rely on approving texts by consensus of 192 countries. The outcome will predict the likelihood of a new treaty being developed at COP 16 in Mexico City in December.

29 November to 10 December 2010. The sixteenth Conference of Parties (COP 16) to be held in Mexico. <http://www.cop16.mx/3w/>

Copenhagen Accord;

http://unfccc.int/files/meetings/cop_15/application/pdf/cop15_cph_auv.pdf

Social

Eurostat Report - 17% of EU Population at risk of Poverty

On the 18th January Eurostat published data, to coincide with the launch of the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion, that indicated that 17% of EU population at risk of poverty. Since 2005, the at risk of poverty rate in the EU27 has been nearly stable, but the statistical office points out that the 'at risk of poverty' rate is a relative measure of poverty, and that the poverty threshold varies greatly between member states.

In 2008, the highest 'at risk of poverty' rates were found in Latvia (26%), Romania (23%), Bulgaria (21%), Greece, Spain and Lithuania (all 20%), and the lowest in the Czech Republic (9%), the Netherlands and Slovakia (both 11%), Denmark, Hungary, Austria, Slovenia and Sweden (all 12%).

http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_PUBLIC/3-18012010-AP/EN/3-18012010-AP-EN.PDF

Health

Priority for competitiveness and innovation in Health and Consumer Protection

At the series of hearings of the commissioners designate, Mr John Dalli, the commissioner designate for health and consumer protection, indicated plans to give priority to the competitiveness of the agri-foods industry and innovation. Consumer safety will remain a leading principle but "zero risk" does not exist. In the area of foodstuffs, the priority will be to complete the food chain strategy and to work for better legislation for the internal market, which is highly regulated in the area of animals, plants, seeds, foods and feed, in order to give fresh impetus to the European agri-foods industry and to stimulate innovation, while respecting health, consumers' interests and the environment.

On clones, GMOs and nanotechnologies, the future commissioner promised to base his decisions on science and ethical values while seeking to promote an innovative Europe and eliminate risks to consumers' health.

Addressing Health Inequalities can boost Economy

According to a report published on 11th January, (produced as as part of the EU-funded 'Determine' project on the socio-economic determinants of health), health inequality is estimated to cost around 1.4% of GDP, and suggests that economic arguments should be used to lobby politicians to direct funds towards health inequality projects.

"Targeted investment to address health inequalities by action on social determinants of health is more cost effective than paying later for the consequences of these inequalities," the report says. The implication is that that addressing health inequalities is not only a matter of social justice but also contributes to growth and productivity and that there evidence that the economies of developed countries are boosted by closing the health inequality gap, according to the authors.

<http://www.health-inequalities.eu/?uid=174231e595a1df3df2ed5386f4795553&id=Seite872>

Commission to consider impact of multiple chemicals.

At the last meeting in 2009 the EU environmental ministers invited the European Commission to consider the need for legislation to protect human and animal health from exposure to multiple chemicals. Under REACH, the EU's chemicals legislation, risk assessments are made on a chemical-by-chemical basis and little is known of the possible the harmful effects when chemicals are combined.

The Commission is set to finalise a study that scientifically assesses the risks related to exposure to multiple chemicals.

Ministers also asked the EU executive to evaluate, by early 2012 at the latest, the extent to which existing EU legislation is sufficient to manage risks resulting from combined exposure, and to consider suitable alternatives.

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/envir/112043.pdf

REACH list of dangerous chemicals doubled

On the 15th January the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA) added a further 14 substances to the list of "very high concern" chemicals to undergo special health and safety

scrutiny under the bloc's chemical regulation REACH, the EUs chemicals legislation. The EU have been proposing substances for inclusion on a list of Substances of 'Very High Concern' (SVHC) and these include chemicals that may cause cancer, birth defects and other serious health defects and which persist in the environment and accumulate in our bodies.

The European Chemicals Agency published the first candidate list of 15 chemicals that present the most cause for concern regarding public health and the environment in October 2008.

http://echa.europa.eu/doc/press/pr_10_01_candidate_list_20100113.pdf

Romania introduces junk food tax.

In March 2010 Romania will introduce a tax on 'junk food', the proceeds of which will be utilised for health programmes. The tax will be applied to those organisations which produce, import or process unhealthy foodstuffs, with a high content of salt, fats, sugar and additives such as, Fast-food products, cake and candy-making industry, Snacks and crisps, and Soda, except water and fresh bottled juice.

A fast-food tax has been discussed in the US but has never been introduced.

Partner Search

- The Youth Council of the San Javier municipality (www.juventud.sanjavier.es), in the Region of Murcia – Spain– is keen to join a partnership for a project in the Cultural and the Escenic Arts fields. They are looking for a consortium already working on a project idea.

This municipality celebrates every year on spring (April) a street arts festival called IMAGINA: www.imaginasanjavier.blogspot.com.

- Castellon's City Council (Valencia Region, Spain) are looking for partners for two new project ideas within the framework of Leonardo, Development of Innovation.:

Protocol of attention and monitoring of seriously injured during the 30 days after the accident: The Unit of Road Safety wants to elaborate a training programme for policemen to be able to assist the victims of serious car accidents during the 30 days after the accident by providing affect and information.

Alternative ways for conflict resolution in police contexts: The unit of Proximity Police aims to research and compare the different methodologies on conflict solution that are being used by the police forces in different parts of the European Union, in order to elaborate a protocol based on how to deal with citizens conflicts avoiding the escalation of it.

- The association of Päijänne-Leader LAG (www.paijanne-leader.net), an official body of rural development in Päijät-Häme area in Southern Finland, is searching for transnational partners from Lithuania, Italy, Poland, Estonia, Sweden, Germany, Great Britain, France and Spain to cooperate in two projects in the area of *Cultural Rural Development*.

The first project titled "*European Transnational Park*" aims to create a frame that enables the local operators to develop local tourism events, products and services and to effectively and collectively market these under the "national park brand".

The second project "*Cultural Rural Attraction for Tourism*" aims to organise visits, meetings, discussions, workshops and seminars, in which new, internationally suitable, tourism service products can be developed and tested.

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