

Does the Commission consider it necessary to review its intentions so as to allow continuation of the status quo as regards EU aid to the tobacco sector, thus avoiding unfair discrimination against tobacco producers vis-à-vis other agricultural producers at EU level?

Answer given by Mr Fischler on behalf of the Commission

(3 September 2001)

On 15 May 2001 the Commission adopted the Communication on a European Union Strategy for Sustainable Development⁽¹⁾ to be presented to the Gothenburg European Council on 15 and 16 June 2001.

This document proposes, as part of a series of measures to address public health issues, phasing out subsidies for raw tobacco following on from the evaluation of the common market organisation for tobacco, which is due to be completed in 2002.

The justification for phasing out this aid is the impact the use of tobacco products has on human health with tobacco use being held responsible for over 500 000 deaths annually in the Community. Subsidies for tobacco-growing are not in accordance therefore with Article 152 (formerly Article 129) of the EC treaty which stipulates that 'a high level of human health protection shall be ensured in the definition and implementation of all Community policies and activities'.

The Commission Communication states, however, that the phasing out of tobacco subsidies can only take place if measures are put in place to develop alternative sources of income and economic activity for tobacco workers and growers.

The Commission will take steps to ensure that the economic and social fabric of rural tobacco-growing areas remains vigorous.

⁽¹⁾ COM(2001) 264 final.

(2002/C 81 E/088)

WRITTEN QUESTION E-1919/01

by Francesco Fiori (PPE-DE) to the Commission

(28 June 2001)

Subject: Funding for hazelnut producers' organisations

The hazelnut market in the Piedmont region is in extremely healthy condition. The producers have formed themselves into two organisations (Asprocor and Ascopiemonte) and concluded advantageous commercial agreements with the processing and confectionery industries.

Under appropriate operational plans, these organisations assist member producers in the marketing of hazelnuts, to great effect.

However, this success story has so far been clouded by obvious disparities in the conditions applying to members of the two organisations.

The Asprocor organisation, which is recognised under Regulation (EEC) No 1035/72⁽¹⁾, has an improvement plan (Regulation (EEC) No 2159/89⁽²⁾) covering some 100 members, and can now extend that plan to cover all its members and pay each member of the organisation approximately EUR 200 per annum for a further six to seven years.

However, the funding for which the Ascopiemonte organisation (recognised under Regulation (EC) No 2200/96⁽³⁾) is eligible is limited by business turnover and the provisions of the regulation itself. In particular, Ascopiemonte is not eligible for the funding available under the improvement plan provided for in Regulation (EEC) No 2159/89.

Will the Commission look into this complex problem and find an appropriate way of ensuring that the subsidies available to one organisation are also made available to the other, not least with a view to preventing large numbers of members from leaving and thus undermining the commercial progress made to date?

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 118, 20.5.1972, p. 1.

⁽²⁾ OJ L 207, 19.7.1989, p. 19.

⁽³⁾ OJ L 297, 21.11.1996, p. 1.

Answer given by Mr Fischler on behalf of the Commission

(4 September 2001)

The Commission takes note of the positive developments in the Piedmont region regarding regrouping of supply into two producer organisations.

Support through operational funds is available to both organisations under Regulation (EC) No 2200/96, and the possibility also exists of funding under rural development programmes.

The specific measures for nuts and locust beans under Regulation (EEC) No 2159/89 were introduced in 1989 as a temporary measure to improve marketing and production, over a 10-year period. The measure was repealed by Regulation (EC) No 2200/96. However existing plans are allowed to continue to term. Existing plans may also be extended once in their 10-year life, through the incorporation of new members and surface areas.

Access to the improvement plan scheme under Regulation (EEC) No 2159/89 was open for a seven year period from 1989 until 21 November 1996, which is the date of entry into force of Regulation (EC) No 2200/96. During this period all producer organisations were entitled to submit an improvement plan. However since Regulation (EC) No 2200/96 does not provide for new improvement plans to be authorised, Ascopiemonte would not be eligible to start a new improvement plan.

In order to benefit from the provisions of Regulation (EEC) No 2159/89, producers of Ascopiemonte would have to join another producer organisation which was extending its improvement plan.

Alternatively the two organisations could also consider merging outside the scope of the improvement plan. While this would not entitle the hazelnut producers of Ascopiemonte to participate in the improvement plan of Asprocor, the merger could be advantageous, particularly in terms of economies of scale. Community funds are available to cover the administrative and legal costs of such a merger through the operational funds.

(2002/C 81 E/089)

WRITTEN QUESTION E-1922/01

by Fiorella Ghilardotti (PSE) and Giovanni Pittella (PSE) to the Commission

(29 June 2001)

Subject: Appointment of middle managers

The post of head of unit responsible for legal affairs in the Commission's Taxation and Customs Union DG has been vacant for nine months. An official has been doing the job in a temporary capacity for the whole of that time. The vacancy has been advertised, and, at the end of the selection procedure, three candidates were short-listed.

Can the Commission say:

- why the acting head of unit was not short-listed although he has been performing the duties to the satisfaction of the Director-General;
- why no candidate was selected from the short list once the selection procedure had been completed;