COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

Brussels, 15 May 2008

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AGRIORG 46
AGRIFIN 26

NOTE

from: Spanish and Italian delegations
to: Council
Subject: Marketing Standards for Fruit and Vegetables

Delegations will find attached a note submitted by the Spanish and Italian delegations supported by France and Hungary, to be dealt with under "Any other business" at the Council (Agriculture and Fisheries) on 19 May 2008.

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Marketing Standards for Fruit and Vegetables

The adoption of this reform was initiated through the political agreement reached in the June 2007 Council meeting which, in its paragraph 15, foresaw that the Commission along with the Member States would analyze the possibility to better define some concepts used in the marketing standards and also would consider the opportunity to reduce the number of products subject to specific marketing standards and to streamline checks and controls.

The process of adoption of the reform of the Fruit and Vegetables CMO was concluded in three steps: first, through the publication of Regulation 1182/2007 and second by way of incorporating the provisions of this regulation into the Single CMO Regulation (Regulation 1234/2007). Finally, Commission Regulation 1580/2007 laid down the implementing provisions of this reform.

Over the last months, the Commission and the Member States have been engaged in the process of modifying Title II of this regulation 1580/2007 which concerns marketing standards. Several meetings of the Working Group on Marketing Standards have been held to discuss the Commission proposal in this respect. We are afraid that, if this proposal is approved, the content and effectiveness of the marketing standards will disappear.

In effect, the Commission proposes to suppress marketing standards for 26 products (currently 36 products count on these marketing standards). Regarding the 10 remaining marketing standards, the Commission also proposes to allow operators to market products not standardized as long as it is clearly indicated that the product is marketed in this way. Finally, the Commission also suggests a general marketing standard for the products not subject to a specific marketing standard.

We believe that the approach taken by the Commission amounts to a dismantling of the marketing standards system in clear contravention to the content and spirit of the Political Agreement reached in June 2007. We think that marketing standards play an important role in facilitating and ensuring transparency in market operations while protecting consumers at the same time.
We request the Commission to reconsider its current position concerning marketing standards so that their effectiveness for producers and consumers is guaranteed while simultaneously controls and checks are rationalized and simplified.

More specifically we intend to require the Commission to carry out three concrete actions:
- to keep marketing standards in place for as many products as possible
- to ensure that the intended general marketing standard is enough and sufficient to ensure clarity and transparency in market operations
- to render marketing standards compulsory for all operators.