



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



Council Conclusions on the Communication from the Commission on Agricultural Product Quality Policy

*2952nd AGRICULTURE and FISHERIES Council meeting
Luxembourg, 22 and 23 June 2009*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"The Council:

1. RECALLING the adoption of the Commission Green Paper on Agricultural Product Quality-product standards, farming requirements and quality schemes on 15 October 2008, as well as the discussions in the Council (Agriculture and Fisheries) of 18 December 2008.
2. RECALLING the wide public consultation of all interested parties at the end of 2008 and the high-level Conference in Prague on 12-13 March 2009.
3. WELCOMES the Commission Communication to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of Regions on agricultural product quality policy of 28 May 2009.
4. WISHES to express its general view on the main aspects covered by this Communication without prejudice to further discussions on specific issues.
5. ACKNOWLEDGING that producers are in a good position to respond to consumers demands for quality; BELIEVES that continued focus on the quality of agricultural products is a key element in contributing to the long-term competitiveness and sustainability of the Community agricultural production and in serving for the benefit to the rural economy;
In particular RECOGNISES that the systems of geographical indication and organic farming are important elements of the EU Agricultural Product Quality Policy, for producers, consumers and regions.

P R E S S

6. BELIEVES that existing EU quality policies have in general worked well in fulfilling agriculture objectives of Community interest. However, their positive effects should be further strengthened and promoted and at the same time some improvements, clarification, innovation and simplification are required.
7. CONSIDERS that a common EU approach on quality is essential for securing the Community's interests vis à vis third countries.
8. DECLARES its ambition to bring about further progress and improvements to quality policy in particular in terms of:
 - improved communication among farmers, buyers and consumers on the quality of EU agricultural products and the level of farming requirements to which the EU agricultural production is subject to;
 - increased coherence of agricultural product quality legislation with other relevant Community legislation;
 - simplification for farmers and producers to apply for, as well as for consumers to benefit from, the various schemes and labelling terms.
9. TAKES NOTE of the Commission's intention that EU compulsory rules on marketing standards should be set out in a general basic marketing standard, in particular in cases where a voluntary approach would lead to confusion on the part of the consumer or disturbance of the internal market.
10. ACKNOWLEDGES that farmers and consumers have called for greater use of place-of-farming labelling. To this end, while taking into account the coherence with all relevant Community legislation on labelling, INVITES the Commission to explore areas where the use of place-of-farming labelling of EU agricultural products could meet these expectations.
11. CONSIDERS that the use of optional reserved terms to define additional information about product qualities and farming attributes for consumers should be kept voluntary; ENCOURAGES the Commission to examine areas where laying down specific optional reserved terms would bring improved clarity and coherence in the Community market; and NOTES the Commission's intention to develop some definitions in this regard, in particular of "mountain" products .
12. RECOGNISES the potential of private and national food certification schemes to meet information needs; however, CONSIDERS that more should be done to avoid confusing consumers and therefore WELCOMES the Commission's intention to bring about improved coherence to such schemes by developing good practice guidelines for certification schemes.

13. CONSIDERS that EU geographical indications systems are essentially sound and deliver benefits to consumers, producers and to the sustainable development of rural areas, in particular by improving the incomes of farmers and by retaining the rural population in these areas; ENCOURAGES the Commission in its efforts to carry out further simplification, clarification and streamlining and CALLS for its enhanced recognition.

14. INVITES the Commission to prepare the ground for a possible recast of the GIs legislation. In this context:

RECALLS the "Commission Statement on the future policy review" of 20 March 2006;

CONSIDERS that bringing together the three registration systems for wines, spirit drinks and agricultural products and foodstuffs could be explored with a view to bringing improvements in terms of coherence, simplification and clarity for stakeholders, while at the same time fully respecting the specificities of these systems and ensuring that the resulting regulatory structure does not lead to an increase in the administrative burden;

CONSIDERS that greater clarity is needed on the different types of intellectual property rights;

RECALLING that protected names may not become generic, INVITES the Commission to consider clarification on "generic terms";

REITERATES that the Commission should seek enhanced protection for EU GIs with respect to third countries, through improvements within the WTO framework as well as bilateral agreements and by inclusion of GIs in the scope of the "Anti-counterfeiting trade agreement" as well as the forthcoming "European observatory on counterfeiting and piracy";

ACKNOWLEDGING the specificities of PDO and PGI schemes, INVITES the Commission to explore possibilities for their simplification; and in particular CONCURS with the suggestions that the Commission should streamline administrative procedures with a view to shortening registration processes and thus making the system more attractive for producers and processors.

15. NOTES that the "traditional specialities guaranteed (TSG)" scheme has yet to prove its potential but BELIEVES that the TSG scheme can still play an important role in the future and therefore INVITES the Commission to explore effective ways for improving the scheme.

16. ACKNOWLEDGES the Commission plans for further developments in the field of organic farming policy, in particular a development of a new compulsory EU organic logo for all EU farmed products as from 2010. WELCOMES the Commission's intention to promote recognition of organic standards as regards third countries and UNDERLINES the issue of controls in this regard. LOOKS FORWARD to a Commission report on the application of the current legislation that will be presented to the Council and the European Parliament in 2011.
 17. TAKES NOTE of the Commission's intention to ensure improved coherence for any future EU schemes.
 18. In the context of the above, further WELCOMES the Commission's intention to:
 - prepare the ground for possible legislative initiatives for GIs and marketing standards, including the development of optional reserved terms;
 - develop guidelines for agricultural product quality certification schemes; and
 - improve recognition, protection and promotion of EU quality schemes in third countries.
 19. Finally, WELCOMES the Commission's intention to prepare the ground for possible legislative initiatives; and INTENDS to have a further discussion on specific issues covered by the Commission Communication with a view to allowing the Commission to consider the suggestions of the Member States made in the Council."
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