



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

The Director-General

Brussels
AGRI.DDG3.G.2/KB/pmc (2020) 2233664

Dear Mrs Caselli,

I am replying to your letter of 26 March 2020¹ addressed to the President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen, concerning the introduction of support measures for the fruit and vegetables sector in light of the COVID19 pandemic.

I understand that you have formulated and submitted for our consideration a brief list of proposals that, in your view, enacted swiftly and with minimal budgetary adjustments while delivering much needed relief to EU fruit and vegetables sector. First of all, I would like to express my appreciation for the work done by the Assembly of European Horticultural Regions (AREFLH) under the current difficult circumstances.

Let me assure you that the Commission fully understands your concerns in this unprecedented, difficult economic situation in the European fruit and vegetables sector because of the outbreak of COVID-19. Currently, Member States and the Commission are working hard and making important efforts to ensure that the situation is under control. The Commission does its part to ensure that the food supply chain continues to function effectively and that the border crossing of goods, transport means and workers remains fluid. I should like to draw your attention to the Commission's general [website](#) concerning the response to the Corona virus.

Further to the above, my services are currently studying all the questions received from Member States and stakeholders' representatives in order to take concrete measures to help producers to overcome this critical period. A package has been adopted to lighten the administrative burden linked to checks and controls and provide flexibility for advance payments.

The Commission adopted a Temporary Framework for State aid measures to support the economy in the current crisis, which allows Member States to channel up to EUR 100,000 to individual farmers including those working in the nursery sector who are facing liquidity shortage. This amount can be topped up by de minimis aid, a type of national support specific to the agricultural sector that can be granted without prior approval from the Commission. Recently the ceiling of this aid was increased to EUR 20,000 within three consecutive years (and up to EUR 25,000 in specific cases). This means that the total national support that can be granted per farm adds up to EUR 120,000 (or EUR 125,000) under the temporary framework. Member States are now in a position to provide assistance under a much more flexible arrangements to the sectors most impacted by the crisis.

¹ Ares(2020)1780797.

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The Commission also issued ‘Guidelines for border management measures to protect health and ensure the availability of goods and essential services’, which were followed by a Communication on the implementation of the guidelines on creating ‘green lanes’. To keep freight moving across the EU during the current pandemic and to ensure that EU-wide supply chains continue to operate, Member States are requested to designate internal border-crossing points on the trans-European transport network as ‘green lane’ border crossings..

Additionally, the Commission adopted on 30 March, a guidance document on the implementation of the temporary restriction on non-essential travel to the EU, on the facilitation of transit arrangements for the repatriation of EU citizens, and on the effects on visa policy.

Addressing your point on activation of the exceptional measures provided for in the Common Market Organisation Regulation (EU) 2013/1308, I take note that you wish to implement exceptional measures provided under Article 219 and Article 222 of Regulation (EU) 2013/1308. However, the EU is currently facing a critical situation in terms of current budget, and no agreement on the future MFF has been reached yet. Moreover, it should be noted that virtually all sectors of the European economy have been impacted, many more severely than the agricultural sector. A wide range of measures has nonetheless been adopted to address the crisis in the agricultural sector but the difficult budgetary situation does restrict our room for manoeuvre.

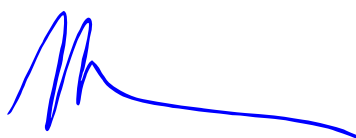
As regards the potential activation of the derogation to competition rules provided by in Article 222 of Regulation (EU) No 1308/2013, I am pleased to inform you that I am proposing to activate Article 222 of Regulation (EU) No 1308/2013 for the live plants and flowers and potatoes sectors with a view to allowing operators to conclude agreements to better address the drop in demand for their products.

Moreover, on 22 April 2020, the Commission announced a set of exceptional measures designed to support the agri-food sector. This package includes measures for private storage aid (PSA) in the dairy and meat sectors, the authorisation of self-organisation market measures by operators in hard hit sectors and flexibility in fruits and vegetables, wine and some other market support programmes (wine, fruits and vegetable, olive oil and apiculture and the EU’s school scheme). This will allow the reorientation of funding priorities towards crisis.

Lastly, the fruit and vegetable sector could also be considered eligible under the rural development programmes if Member States use this possibility. In this context, risk management tools may compensate farmers for significant losses suffered as a consequence of the crisis. In addition, support may also be provided through investments aiming to restore the production potential of the nursery eventually damaged by the outbreak of Covid-19.

Let me finish by ensuring you that DG Agri, in collaboration with the national administrations of the Member States is firmly committed to find ways to help the agri-food sector throughout these difficult times.

Yours sincerely,



Wolfgang BURTSCHER