

21th June 2018

European Commission
Commissioner Phil HOGAN

cc: DG AGRI/Director-General Jerzy Bogdan PLEWA

DROUGHT IS CAUSING SEVERE PROBLEMS TO FARMERS IN THE BALTIC STATES AND THE NORDIC COUNTRIES

The weather situation has been exceptional in May and in the beginning of June. Therefore, on Friday 15.6.2018, Copa member organizations from Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Denmark, Sweden and Finland assembled to discuss the recent issues in each respective States, and of these issues the most common and prevailing is the drought we are suffering from. Thus, we are jointly appealing to you, the European Commission for assistance.

Most of the farms in these countries are suffering from the most severe drought for over 50 years. The area around the Baltic Sea has been without rain since the beginning of May, whereas at the same time the temperatures have been unusually high for the time of year. Therefore, spring sowing has failed greatly. As a result of the drought, the seeds have not germinated in the dry soil or the plants have died because of the heat and drought.

The same regions suffered from too much rain last summer and autumn, subsequently causing massive harvest losses. Furthermore, sowing in the autumn was not possible because of the heavy rainfall. For this reason, spring crops have been cultivated to much greater extent in the area this spring than normally. Crops planted in autumn have generally endured the drought better. Oilseeds, leguminous plants and grain have suffered the most. It is estimated that 30 - 50% of the harvest this year is already lost. Even if there is rain later this summer, it will not be a significant relief for the situation in arable production; uneven vegetation, which ripens at different times will be difficult to harvest in autumn, and results in poor quality.

The first yield of grass silage has been harvested in the whole area, and yield losses are a fact. The amounts harvested are 30 - 50% lower than usual years. After harvesting, the grass is extremely vulnerable to drought and fertilizers can cause burning damage to the grass in dry conditions. The farmers are now distressed that they do not have enough feed for the animals for next winter. In these severe conditions it is of utmost importance that all available grassland, including ecological focus areas, can be harvested without restrictions.

We urge the Commission to closely follow up the development on farm level and prepare for compensatory actions and measures to ensure animal welfare and the livelihood of farmers suffering from the drought.

The severity of the economic situation in farms, and particularly in the dairy farms losing the fodder crop for the second consecutive year now, generates serious financial difficulties and cash-flow problems for beneficiaries. Due to the exceptional nature of the circumstances and the resulting financial difficulties, it is necessary to allow Member States to pay a higher level of advances to beneficiaries for claim year 2018.

Also, many farmers have serious difficulties in meeting the greening requirements on ecological focus areas. Typically, they rely on catch crops and undersown grass to fulfill the requirements, and with the extremely dry conditions there is a significant risk that the seeds will not sprout. This is the case right now for many dairy farmers which are depending on undersown grass in maize. These farmers have no real alternative.

In view of the seriousness of the financial difficulties, Member States should be allowed, as an exceptional measure for claim year 2018, to pay advances of up to 70 % for the support payments and of up to 85 % from the support granted under rural development. By way of derogation from the first subparagraph of the Article 75(2) of Regulation (EU) No 1306/2013, the advances for the support payments should be allowed to be paid after the administrative checks have been finalized.

Furthermore, Member States should be allowed to derogate from the requirement to establish ecological focus areas e.g. when farmers due to the drought are unable to ensure that established catch crops or undersown grass will sprout.

Lastly, there is also a great demand for direct EU-compensation for yield loss. Without crisis measures and direct support, the farmers' economy will collapse and not survive over the winter. This is the third year in a row with extreme weather conditions in the area, and the farmers' financial situation is at the breaking point. Farmers' incomes are already extremely low and are continuing to decline, causing an exodus from the rural areas, especially among younger generations. Therefore, farmers in the affected area now need a positive response to this serious situation, and a promise that they will not be left alone with the problems caused by extreme weather conditions.

We would like to thank you for your consideration. Should you require any further clarifications of the on-going situation in our countries, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours sincerely,



Juha Marttila
President of the Central Union of Agricultural Producers and Forest Owners (FI)

On behalf of the participants of the Nordic-Baltic Meeting listed below:

EPKK - Estonian Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce (EE)

ZSA - Farmers Parliament (LV)

LAOCC - Latvian Agricultural Organization Cooperation Council (LV)

LZF - Latvian Farmer's Federation (LV)

LSA - Latvian Agricultural Statutory Societies (LV)

Latvian Agricultural Cooperatives Association (LV)
LUS - Lithuanian Farmers' Union (LT)
LŽUBA - Lithuanian Association of Agricultural Companies (LT)
DAFC - Danish Agriculture and Food Council (DK)
LRF - Lantbrukarnas Riksförbund (SE)
MTK - Central Union of Agricultural Producers and Forest Owners (FI)
SLC - Svenska lantbruksproducenternas centralförbund (FI)