

Aid scheme for the supply of fruit and vegetables, bananas and milk in the educational establishments

2014/0014(COD) - 15/01/2016 - Committee report tabled for plenary, 1st reading/single reading

The Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development adopted the report by Marc TARABELLA (S&D, BE) on the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulation (EU) No 1308/2013 and Regulation (EU) No 1306/2013 as regards the aid scheme for the supply of fruit and vegetables, bananas and milk in the educational establishments.

The committee recommended that the European Parliaments position, adopted at first reading following the ordinary legislative procedure, should amend the Commission proposal as follows:

Promoting healthy eating habits: in the current context of declining consumption of fresh fruit and vegetables and milk products, especially among children, and of an increasing incidence of child obesity as a result of consumption habits geared to highly processed foods which, additionally, are often high in added sugars, salt, fat or additives, Members insisted on Union aid to finance the supply to children in educational establishments of selected agricultural products should do more to promote healthy eating habits and the consumption of local products.

Participation in the aid scheme and eligible products: Member States wishing to participate in the aid scheme shall prioritise the distribution of products of either or both of the following groups:

- fruit and vegetables and fresh products of banana sector;
- drinking milk and its lactose-free versions.

However, in order to promote the consumption of specific products and/or to respond to particular nutritional needs of children in its territory, a Member State may provide for the distribution of:

- processed fruit and vegetable products in addition to fruit and vegetables and fresh products of banana sector;
- cheese and curd, yoghurt and other fermented or acidified milk products without added flavouring, fruit, nuts or cocoa in addition to drinking milk and its lactose-free versions.

Member States may additionally complement the distribution of fermented milk products without fruit juice, naturally flavoured, or with fruit juice, naturally flavoured or non-flavoured or milk-based drinks with cocoa, fruit juice or naturally flavoured (category I) or naturally flavoured and non-flavoured milk products with fruit, fermented or not (category II).

In such case the Union aid shall be paid only for the milk component of the distributed product which shall not be lower than 90% by weight for Category I of Annex V and 75% by weight for Category II of Annex V.

Products distributed under the school scheme shall not contain added sugars, added salt, added fat, added sweeteners and added artificial flavour enhancers E 620 to E 650.

However, any Member State may decide that eligible products may contain limited quantities of added sugar, added salt, and/or added fat after obtaining the appropriate authorisation of their national authorities responsible for health and nutrition in line with their national procedures.

Financing provisions: the aid under the school scheme allocated for the distribution of products, the accompanying educational measures and the related costs shall not exceed EUR 250 million per school year, of which:

- for school fruit and vegetables: EUR 150 million per school year;
- for school milk: EUR 100 million per school year.

The amended text also provides that:

- without exceeding the global ceiling of EUR 250 million resulting from the amounts referred to under points (a) and (b) of paragraph 1, any Member State may transfer once per school year up to 20% of one or the other of its indicative allocations. However, that percentage may be increased up to 25% for the Member States with outermost regions and in other duly justified cases, such as where a Member State needs to address specific market situation in the sector covered by the school scheme, its particular concerns of low consumption of one or the other group of products, or other societal changes;
- Union aid may be used to extend the scope or effectiveness of any existing national school schemes or school distribution schemes providing school fruit and vegetables and school milk but shall not replace funding for these existing national schemes, except for free distribution of meals to children in educational establishments;
- Member States may finance those payments by means of a levy on the sector concerned or by any other contribution from the private sector;
- the Union may also finance information, publicity, monitoring and evaluation measures relating to the school scheme, including raising public awareness of its objectives, and related networking measures aimed at exchanging experience and best practices in order to facilitate the implementation and management of the scheme.

Accompanying educational measures: these measures represent a critical tool to reconnect children with agriculture and the variety of Union agricultural products, particularly those produced in their region, with the help of, for example, nutrition experts and farmers.

Moreover, Member States should be allowed to include in their thematic measures a wider variety of agricultural products, such as processed fruit and vegetables without the addition of sugar, salt, fat, sweeteners and artificial flavours enhancers. Member States should also be allowed to include other local, regional or national specialities, such as honey, table olives and olive oil.

Visibility of Union aid: in order to promote awareness of the school scheme and to increase the visibility of Union aid, the power to adopt certain acts should be delegated to the Commission in respect of the obligation by Member States to clearly publicise the Union support for implementing the scheme including in relation to publicity tools and, if appropriate, the common identifier or graphic elements.