

Brussels in Brief: 20 - 24 May 2019

EU27 leaders affirm commitment to EU with Sibiu Declaration

Last week EU27 leaders met in the Romanian city of Sibiu on Europe Day (May 9) to discuss the future direction of the European Union for the period 2019-2024. The leaders adopted the [Sibiu Declaration](#), which gives ten broad commitments around unity and strength in Europe. Some of the commitments include: defending one Europe; staying united; looking for joint solutions; and safeguarding the future for the next generations of Europeans. Following the meeting in Sibiu, officials from the member states will develop the 2019-2024 Strategic Agenda, which will be put forward for adoption at the next European Council summit on June 20-21. In the margins of the meeting politicians also discussed the process of appointing Presidents for the commission, council and European Central Bank, all of which are scheduled to take place in the coming months.

Compensation package for Irish beef farmers

It was announced last week that a compensation package for Irish beef farmers has been agreed by the European Commission. The package could be up to €100m with €50m from the EU and the possibility of €50m match funding from the Irish government. The fund is aimed at compensating beef farmers for the impact of Brexit on their businesses and comes after a period of significant pressure on the Irish government from the sector.

It is being reported that there will be certain conditions and actions to complete to draw down the money but full details are unlikely to be available for a couple of weeks. It is also unclear for the moment when exactly the money might land in bank accounts. Unsurprisingly the Irish Farmers' Association (IFA) has welcomed the package especially given that their internal analysis indicated that their beef farmers had lost €100m as a result of Brexit. This figure was based on losses calculated due to a combination of the uncertainty caused by Brexit, the devaluation of sterling and the impact of Brexit on beef prices. With European elections just around the corner, the announcement comes at an important time for the Irish government.

EFSA to review bee guidance document

The European Commission has asked the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) to update its guidance document on the risk assessment of pesticides and bees. The current guidance was published in 2013 and is hugely controversial especially in relation to neonicotinoids. The commission is reacting to requests from member states and to the fact that new evidence has become available since the document was published. EFSA is therefore setting up a consultative stakeholder group that will include representatives from the farming community and will focus on a range of issues including evidence on bee mortality and exposure routes. The guidance is expected to be finalised in 2021.

Report on residues of veterinary medicines

The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) published a report yesterday on information it had collected from member states on the presence of residues of veterinary medicines and contaminants in animals and animal-derived food in 2017. The conclusion was that the data showed 'high rates of compliance with recommended safety levels' and that the 'presence of prohibited substances was also low'. The percentage of non-compliant targeted samples was 0.35% which was within the range (0.25%-0.37%) reported over the previous 10 years. The information is broken down by sector and type of substance and the whole report is available [here](#).

UK Farmers Navigating Change in Europe

In preparation for the European elections on Thursday 23rd the UK farming unions published a document last week outlining our policy priorities for the future. Aimed at new MEPs and all policy makers [‘UK farmers navigating change in Europe: An agenda for the future’](#) highlights six critical policy areas where action is needed to help our members deliver a profitable, productive and progressive farming sector. These are Brexit, Trade and Standards, Climate Change, Environment, Healthy Plants & Animals and Science and Innovation.

Even though our future relationship with the EU is still uncertain the document outlines the importance of developing an enabling regulatory regime for our sector. It also highlights that farmers across Europe share the same challenges and reiterates how important it is to maintain positive relationships with our European neighbours.

European Elections

EU citizens will elect 751 new Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) this week. The elections will take place from 23 to 26 May across the continent and results for all member states will be announced from Sunday night. The new MEPs are elected for a five year term from July 2019 to July 2024 but as a result of the uncertainty over Brexit, it is unclear how long the 73 members from the UK will be in post.

The European Parliament is the only directly elected institution in the EU and MEPs play a critical role in shaping EU policies on everything from agriculture to aviation. Without question these elections are important for the UK but the results will also be eagerly awaited throughout the EU. Many commentators are suggesting that the traditional EU parties in the European Parliament will lose seats and new groups are likely to be formed if an increased number of MEPs with more extreme views on both the left and right are elected. The shape of the parliament will therefore have a huge impact on the EU’s future - not just in relation to policy issues such as Brexit, trade and the environment, but the MEPs will also help decide who will hold top key EU jobs such as the European Commission President.

The week ahead

The World Farmers’ Organisation General Assembly will take place in Luxembourg from Monday to Thursday this week.

The Standing Committee on Plants, Animals, Food and Feed will take place on Monday and Tuesday this week where emergency authorisations, the Bee Guidance documents and the proposed non-renewal of herbicide active substance desmedipham (DMP) will be discussed.

European elections will take place on Thursday 23 May in the UK and across Europe from 23 – 26 May.