



Welcome to the latest edition of Brussels in Brief. The BAB team is here, we are in Brussels and we want to work with you and your members. You can find [here](#) a who's who of the team. Please feel free to contact us.

### **The majority of consumers want compulsory labelling on all genetically modified food**

A majority of European consumers would want to see compulsory labelling on food products containing genetically modified crops, according to a recent Ipsos report, but industry players insist that this is impossible to implement.

The [report](#), commissioned by the Greens/EFA group in the European Parliament and carried out by the polling organisation Ipsos, surveyed thousands of consumers across all 27 member states between February and March of this year in an attempt to gauge their understanding and attitudes towards genetically modified (GM) crops. This included both "conventional" genetically modified organisms (GMOs), which involves the genetic transfer between different species, as well as gene edited (GE) crops, created using new genetic engineering techniques such as CRISPR. It found that, of those which have heard of the technology, 86% of people want food containing GMOs to be labelled accordingly, while 68% of respondents that have heard of new genomic techniques would also like these to be clearly labelled. While 78% of those surveyed had heard of GM crops, only 40% on average across all EU member states reported prior knowledge of GE crops.

As it currently stands, EU legislation stipulates that GM food must be clearly labelled, stating that, in the case of pre-packaged GM food/feed products, the list of ingredients must indicate "genetically modified" or "produced from genetically modified [name of the organism]", while non-packaged products require a notice nearby. However, products from animals fed with GM crops are exempt from GMO labelling.

The report comes amid heated debate over the future of the technology after a 2018 European Court of Justice ruling found that GE crops fall, in principle, under the EU's GMO directive.

The outcome of this ruling has since been heavily disputed however, with industry players pushing for the decision to be revised so as to exclude GE crops from the scope of EU regulations governing GMOs. This would include labelling rules, something the Greens/EFA warn would deprive consumers of their right to know how their food is produced, and leave them "no opportunity to avoid GM food".

A Commission official said that the next step for the EU executive will be the publication of a study on new genomic techniques, which aims to clarify the situation in light of the 2018 court ruling. The study is expected to be published at the end of April.

### EU Animal Welfare standards to be given "special attention"

A European Commission assessment of the EU's animal welfare strategy says none of its objectives have been "fully achieved" and that legislative compliance remains "a key challenge."

The **staff working document** singles out animal transport; the routine docking, or cutting, of pigs' tails; and some stunning methods as compliance "risk areas" and says that a forthcoming legislative review will pay "special attention" to them. The docking of pig tails remains a routine practice in 26 out of the 28 EU countries surveyed (including the UK), despite a formal prohibition on the practice under the EU's pig welfare directive.

The study also found that 43 percent of respondents to a public consultation and 11 out of 15 NGOs surveyed indicated that the EU's slaughter regulation was not being complied with. Procedures for stunning poultry with electrical water baths were identified as a significant cause of concern.



### France pitches carbon border levy to WTO chief



French Economy and Trade ministers presented a proposal for a European carbon border levy to the new World Trade Organization's Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala and simultaneously announced the launch of a working group on this subject. The working group between France, other European countries who wish to join, and the WTO, aims to make sure that the new mechanism complies with WTO rules and doesn't penalize developing countries.

## Cyprus wins EU protection for halloumi cheese

Halloumi, a traditional Cypriot cheese, has today (12 April) been entered into the EU's **register of protected designations of origin**. Usually made from goat and sheep's milk, halloumi was only a registered trademark, giving it less protection from production made elsewhere.

The designation, which was agreed by EU member states at the end of March, means that only cheese made in Cyprus (including in Northern Cyprus) under specified conditions can be called halloumi, or hellim. Its formal adoption and publication are now expected by mid-April, an EU spokeswoman told AFP on Tuesday.

In August 2020, Cyprus became the first country among the EU's 27 member states to reject the ratification of the EU-Canada free trade agreement over concerns for the lack of legal protections for halloumi.

## Division builds over future bee protection

Two rival camps of EU countries are facing off over how strictly to protect bees from pesticides. EU countries are trying to agree on a political target for protecting bees, having refused to support strict guidelines that were proposed by the European Commission in 2013, which would have required additional exhaustive tests on any pesticides that kill off more than 7 percent of a bee colony.

Farming powerhouses France and Spain are taking opposing views on what maximum proportion of a beehive it should be acceptable for an insecticide to threaten. France, Sweden, Slovenia and the Netherlands want to maintain the strict 7 percent threshold floated in 2013. On the other side, Spain, Greece, Hungary, and Belgium are pushing for a much higher 23.2 percent figure, based on fresh science conducted by EFSA which stated that bee colonies naturally fluctuate in size by 23.2 percent.

## ING Bank questions whether dairy sector can meet organic goals

The EU faces "major obstacles" to realizing its centerpiece target for increasing organic farming under the Farm to Fork strategy, according to an **in-depth analysis** released by the Netherlands' **largest bank**, ING. The dairy sector in particular "will struggle to meet the EU's organic targets," the paper says.

According to ING the F2F strategy has received "mixed support" from farmers, industry and agriculture ministers and redirecting funding toward its goals will be an uphill battle, as will encouraging consumer demand.

The study says organic's overall share will only rise "when there are farmers who want to produce, dairy companies that are able to process the milk ... retailers and caterers who see opportunities to market these products and consumers who are willing to pay a bit extra".

Sustainability practices under the F2F are "much needed," according to the report's author, Thijs Geijer, a senior economist at ING. Nevertheless, their costs "will be felt by Europe's farmers, food producers and consumers". Kiran Sanchit, ING's EMEA managing director,

added that most big dairy firms were focusing on reducing methane emissions rather than increasing organics. "

Alexander Anton, the secretary general of the European Dairy Association, welcomed the report for injecting "a good and much appreciated share of realism into the picture." Reaching the EU's 25 percent objective would require "massive" support and framing that would be "much more substantial than shifting a few dozen millions of euros of the EU promotion program budget to organic promotion," he said, adding: "I don't see this happening either."

## **CAP criticised for lack of support for young entrants**

CAP measures designed to encourage generational renewal in agriculture are "unsuited to encouraging new entrants" due to their complexity & a lack of advice according to a paper published by the Commission on April 8. The 92-page Commission staff working document '**Evaluation of the impact of the CAP on generational renewal, local development & jobs in rural areas**', also includes a warning that income support may keep older farmers in the industry as they use it to compensate for low pensions.

Just 11% of farm managers in the EU were under 40 in the EU, while almost a third are 65 or older. Over the last decade the proportion of young farmers in the industry has fallen, while that of farmers over 40 years of age has grown. "While this reflects to a certain extent the general ageing of rural societies, it is also linked to the slow inter-generational transfer of farms," DG AGRI officials say, adding that "the oldest farmers have the smallest farms: the average size of younger farmers' holdings is slightly more than 2.5 times bigger than the average older farmer's farm." That means that "the proportion of young farmers thus cannot be expected to grow as quickly as the proportional decline in older farmers," they outline.

The evaluation involved examining, in terms of generational renewal, the supports available for young farmers under the 1st & 2nd Pillars, but also looking at the effect of other support measures "that make rural areas more attractive for people to work & live," they add. However, EU officials point out that the CAP "is not the most significant factor influencing generational renewal, local development & job creation in the EU," noting that "many entry barriers to the agricultural sector, such as access to land, are determined by national law." There are also external factors, "such as socio-economic conditions in rural areas."

They describe the impact of generational renewal measures in the CAP on the actual number of young farmers as "mostly positive although sometimes modest, with significant variation across regions & systems." "The most significant effect is in sparsely populated, less developed areas with many small farms. In regions with large farms, high CAP expenditure, & an ageing farm population the effect is very small."

There is also a lower uptake of the measures where there's a lack of available advice, because of the complexity of applications. Rather than encouraging farm succession, these measures are more likely to increase the socio-economic sustainability of farm businesses after young farmers have set up operations. "There is evidence that income support may slow inter-generational farm transfer," DG AGRI officials warn. "This is because some older farmers use the payments as income support beyond what would be a usual retirement age to compensate for low pensions." The writers conclude that "CAP generational renewal measures are not well adapted to support the entry of young farm managers with

no family background in farming to the farming sector,” something for which they say specific evidence was cited in EE, FR, IT, HU & Flanders. Officials complain of a lack of a strategic approach for generational renewal for the 1st & 2nd Pillars in most Member States, pointing out that the individual countries could learn from each others’ good practices. “Older farmers remaining at work & on farms into later age is an issue for which national policies, such as pension schemes, are partly responsible”.

### France has opened a crisis fund for farmers impacted by the cold weather

Highly variable weather in France has prompted the government to open up a crisis fund for farmers across the country, French Agriculture Minister Julien Denormandie told FranceInfo radio last week, naming wine, arboriculture, beets and oilseeds as the worst affected crops. However, Denormandie has not said how much money will be made available. The weather in France dipped from highs of around 20 degrees Celsius to -5 degrees, leaving some budding spring crops completely frozen. Denormandie said there would be a “total mobilization” to help farmers, saying insurers and banks also need to play their part to help.

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