Opinion on the proposal for a Council Regulation (EC) on the common organization of the market in processed fruit and vegetables

(96/C 82/07)

On 17 November 1995 the Council decided to consult the Economic and Social Committee, under Articles 43 and 198 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, on the above-mentioned proposal.

The Section for Agriculture and Fisheries, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its Opinion on 30 November 1995. The Rapporteur was Mr Bento Gonçalves.

At its 331st Plenary Session (meeting of 20 December 1995), the Economic and Social Committee adopted the following Opinion by a large majority with 22 dissenting votes and 15 abstentions.

1. The Committee considers that the Commission proposal treats the processed fruit and vegetable sector in an uneven manner. The Commission proposes three different aid systems: a quota system for aid for tomato processing, a guarantee threshold for peaches and pears, and per-hectare payments for dried grapes.

2. The Committee also regrets the absence of a separate proposal on the processing of citrus fruit, and considers that the Commission should present such a proposal at the earliest possible opportunity.

3. Bearing in mind production trends in the EU, and the international competition situation, the Committee supports the inclusion of apricots and asparagus in Annex I.

4. All the thresholds and quotas should be increased to reflect consumption in the three new Member States and the increase in world consumption.

5. In view of the various problems and sensitivities between Member States and the Commission, and the existing divergences concerning processed tomato quotas, the Committee thinks it necessary to devise a compromise solution to ensure that:

— there is no reduction in the overall processing quota for the EU as a whole;

— no Member State is disadvantaged by the quota distribution.

6. To this end, the Committee would ask the Council and Commission to consider the following recommendations and options:

6.1. The processed tomato quota should be increased by at least the consumption level of the three new Member States and the increase in world consumption, to a figure of around 7 600 000 tonnes of fresh tomatoes.

6.2. This increased quota should be turned into a Community threshold, accompanied by a penalty system for overruns applicable only to the Member State responsible.

6.3. A compensation system should be established so that, when a Member State does not reach the allocated production levels, the difference can be used by another Member State. Pursuant to the objective set out in the first indent of point 5 above, the unused portion can be carried over to the next year and distributed among the Member States in proportion to their original quotas.

6.3.1. As a general rule, the total Community quota should be distributed between the Member States on the basis of average production during the last three years in which the conditions of production were normal.

6.3.1.1. However, given the serious quota losses which this system could mean for certain Member States, the Committee considers that these Member States should be provisionally allowed to keep their present quotas, for a transitional period. At the end of this period, the Commission should propose an adjustment of the quota based on the production and industrial situation of the Member States concerned, using fair, objective criteria and calculated according to the terms set out in point 6.3.1 above.

7. The Committee would draw attention to the need to safeguard Community production in trade agreements with third countries, in order to prevent any devastating impact on European agriculture.

Done at Brussels, 20 December 1995.

The President
of the Economic and Social Committee
Carlos FERRER

APPENDIX

to the Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee

The following amendments were defeated during the debate:

Point 3

Delete.

Reason

Adding further products to the list of EU subsidized ones runs counter to the whole objective of the CAP reform. The Commission has repeatedly explained why further products cannot and should not be added.

Voting

For: 41, against 66, abstentions: 7.

Point 6.1

Delete.

Reason

This paragraph is based on a misapprehension. The quotas concerned have nothing to do with consumption in the new Member States. These quotas give extra production subsidies to the producers concerned. However the new Member States produce no processing tomatoes. Increased quotas therefore give no benefit to the new States but these would have to contribute to the extra costs involved.

Voting

For: 46, against: 63, abstentions: 10.