COVID-19: PRESIDENCY PREPARES DEBATE ON IMPACT OF PANDEMIC ON FOOD SECTOR

The Croatian Presidency is planning to hold a high-level video conference on the impact of COVID-19 on the food sector among Agriculture & Fisheries Ministers next week, in a bid to reassure the public about ample food supplies & the proper functioning of the supply chain. Guided by Croatia’s Agriculture Minister Marija Vučković, delegations will also hold an exchange of views on the impact of the Coronavirus on their respective agri-food & fisheries sectors and the specific challenges they are facing. The aim is to hold the meeting one of the days early next week (March 23-25), with Presidency officials awaiting confirmation from the Council Secretariat & technical teams in terms of the exact timeslot (more than likely three hours). Commissioners Janusz Wojciechowski (Agriculture) & Virginijus Sinkevičius (Environment & Fisheries) are both expected to contribute to the high-level debate. As this is not a “formal” gathering, no decisions can be taken. Sources underline the importance of delivering a “common message” to the public about the role that farmers play in ensuring an uninterrupted supply of safe food to EU citizens during these unprecedented times & the need to avoid stockpiling. Next week’s meeting was more about people rather than market measures & intervention, they outline, adding that there could be scope to discuss flexibility in terms of investments within the current framework that would not impede CAP rules. Meanwhile, EU leaders are expected to hold a further video-link next week to discuss the spread of the virus, while the ‘ordinary’ European Council (March 26-27) has been postponed until a later date - agenda items included Industrial Strategy & Digital Agenda as well as Enlargement policy & preparation for the EU-Western Balkans Summit in Zagreb (May 7).

Direct payments deadline extended: The Commission confirmed this week (March 17) that it will allow Member States to extend the deadline for applications for direct payments & certain rural development payments by one month, in response to the COVID-19 crisis. The announcement follows a request from the Italian authorities, which was granted last week [see AF21-20]. All national capitals can now take advantage of the rule change, but it is up to them whether they do so. DG AGRI officials are currently preparing legal steps to allow a derogation. The new deadline for farmers to submit their CAP applications will be June 15, instead of May 15.

IRELAND’S CREAM, FARM GROUPS & DAIRY INDUSTRY CALL FOR COVID-19 ASSISTANCE

Creed’s plea as pandemic deals blow to farm sector: Ireland’s Minister Michael Creed has called on Farm Commissioner Janusz Wojciechowski to carefully monitor the development of agricultural commodity markets as COVID-19 takes hold & “ensure that the full range of market supports available under the Common Market Organisation Regulation are available for deployment in response to any emerging market disturbance.” In a single-page letter (dated March 13), the Fine Gael politician raises the “potential” impact of the pandemic on “demand for agricultural commodities, with potentially extremely serious consequences for farmers & the food industry.” Creed reiterates that “our shared concern is of course the impact on human health,” acknowledging the measures taken across the bloc inc. “significant restrictions on our citizens’ normal life” designed to delay the further spread of the virus. The Cudrun man states that “beyond that over-riding priority … there will undoubtedly be very serious economic impacts,” expressing the Irish Government’s appreciation of the “significant economic package to respond to the crisis” announced by President von der Leyen last Friday [see below].

The EU Farm Chief is currently preparing a letter to be sent to national capitals ahead of next week’s “virtual” meeting, which acknowledges that the lockdown in certain Member States will cause hardship for many sectors inc. agri-food. Sources suggest the Commissioner stands ready to allow further flexibility to the implementation of CAP rules, if need be.

Farm groups call for COVID-19 assistance: Copa-Cogeca & the European Council of young farmers (CEJA) have written to Commission President Ursula von der Leyen calling for “all measures that can safeguard & guarantee the functioning of agricultural activity & its cash-flow,” to be introduced in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic.
In a single-page letter (dated today, March 18), Presidents Joachim Rukwied (COPA) & Ramon Armengol (COGECA) & Jannes Maes (CEJA), urge the EU’s executive to act so that “the single market, & in particular, EU agriculture continue to function smoothly.” Copied to Commissioners Janusz Wojciechowski (Agriculture) & Stella Kyriakides (Health), the correspondence also contains a plea, “in the light of a further tightening of restrictions,” for farmers & farm cooperatives to be “able to continue their activity in order to guarantee the daily supply of food & by-products to EU citizens.” “We call on the Commission to make support available to the agricultural & agri-tourism sectors, which are among the ‘sectors particularly affected in the current circumstances’,” the three signatories add, a nod to previous measures for other parts of the economy hit by the pandemic [see below]. “Under these exceptional circumstances, the support should come from outside the agricultural budget.” “Farmers, forest owners & their cooperatives are facing an increasingly difficult situation,” they explain, complaining that the pandemic was “now leading to dramatic consequences in the most affected rural areas of the EU.” “This mounting crisis potentially puts both the single market & international markets at stake, threatening supply chains, jobs & ultimately EU food security,” they add, requesting an exchange of views with von der Leyen on these topics “in the near future.”

**Dairy industry calls for measures to ensure smooth supply chain:** European Dairy Association (EDA) Secretary General Alexander Anton has written to top Commission officials calling for measures to ensure milk & dairy supply chains can continue to operate despite what he calls a “shutdown” across large parts of the EU. In a 3-page letter* (dated March 17), Anton urged the EU’s executive to allow “frictionless milk collection and milk & dairy distribution,” across the EU & across borders. He wants policy-makers to activate Private Storage Aid (PSA) for butter, skimmed milk powder & all types of cheese. The lobbyist is also pushing for the establishment of a “scheme to allow a priority-based access to container & freight capacities for products categorised as ‘essential’, like milk & dairy products.”

The former Director of the Brussels’ office of the German Dairy Association (Nov 2001- Dec 2006) points out that dairy operations run “full engine” to keep shops & fridges stocked. Any disruption would “inevitably lead to a closing down of processing capacities with massive consequences on the milk & dairy supply,” with the risk that some milk might not be processed. On the other hand, Anton also fears a loss of demand from the hotel, restaurant & catering sector, just as the seasonal peak in dairy output approaches. Export of milk & dairy products is, therefore, key for the sector, he says, also highlighting the importance of container & freight availability. *The correspondence is addressed to DG SANTE Director General Anne Bucher, Acting DG AGRI Director General Maria Angelies Benitez Salas, DG AGRI Acting Deputy Director General, Michael Scannell, DG SANTE Director (Public health, country knowledge & crisis management), John Ryan & Agricultural Counsellors of Member States & the UK, as well as copies to President von der Leyen’s crisis management team & Cabinets of Commissioners Janez Lenarčič (Crisis Management), Wojciechowski (Agriculture) & Kyriakides (Health)*

**Commission addresses pandemic with funding, flexibility:** The Commission announced a series of changes at the end of last week (March 13), designed to help support healthcare & adversely affected parts of the economy, with emergency funding & increased flexibility for Member States. Following a decision to reinforce external borders (coordinated, temporary restrictions on non-essential travel to the bloc for a period of 30 days), Commission President Ursula von der Leyen told a press conference in Brussels that she was “convinced that the EU can withstand this shock,” but that “each Member State needs to live up to its full responsibility.” As well as being an unprecedented challenge for healthcare systems, the pandemic would be “a major shock for our economies.” At a joint press briefing with Executive Vice-Presidents Margrethe Vestager & Valdis Dombrovskis, the Commission chief stressed the importance of slowing the spread of the virus.

von der Leyen emphasised the need to preserve the single market, to ensure continuity of supplies for healthcare. “For any measures to be effective, they need to be coordinated at EU level,” she said. “Member States, especially neighbouring ones, need to work very closely together.” She encouraged national capitals to support the sectors of the economy, for example, tourism, transport or retail, most likely to be adversely affected. The EU would provide flexibility on State Aid & within the Stability & Growth Pact. Other measures include the setting up of a Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative to provide support for the healthcare sector, the labour market & SMEs from all affected sectors. “This is an important economic package. But we have to acknowledge that the situation is evolving very fast. We stand ready to do more as the situation evolves,” she concluded. The Commission has taken the view that the pandemic qualifies as “unusual events outside the control of government,” fitting the criteria for exceptional spending.

Some €1 billion is to be redirected from the EU budget to the European Investment Fund as a guarantee to incentivise banks to provide liquidity to SME businesses, helping at least 100 000 European SMEs & ‘midcaps’ - companies with medium-sized levels of capitalisation, usually defined as between €2bn (€1.8bn) & €10bn (€9.2bn), with about €8bn of funding. The EU’s executive is also accelerating preparation of a proposal for a European Unemployment Reinsurance Scheme designed to support Member State policies that preserve jobs & skills. The new Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative will facilitate the deployment of the European Social Fund & the Commission also suggests that the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund could also be used to support dismissed workers & the self-employed, with up to €179m available in 2020. The Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative is a proposal to put €37bn under Cohesion Policy into the fight against the pandemic. The Commission proposes, this year, to relinquish its obligation to Member
States to refund unspent pre-financing under the structural funds, providing about €8bn, which national capitals will be able to use to supplement €29bn across the EU for 2020. A further proposal is to extend the scope of the EU Solidarity Fund, to include a public health crisis, making up to €800m available in 2020. Earlier today (March 18), EU Ambassadors agreed the Council’s position on two legislative proposals that will free up funds to tackle the outbreak – the Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative to make available €37bn of Cohesion Funds to Member States. About €8bn in liquidity will be released from unspent pre-financing in 2019 for programmes under the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, Cohesion Fund & European Maritime & Fisheries Fund, while the measure will provide access to a further €29bn of structural funds across the EU for 2020. Ambassadors also endorsed a proposal to extend the scope of the EU Solidarity Fund to cover public health emergencies. Both were approved without amendments. The EP must now agree its position, once MEPs give the green light, the Council is expected to adopt the measures by written procedure.

MEMBER STATES MUST KEEP CROSS-BORDER TRADE OPEN, EUROCOMMERCE INSISTS

Retail & wholesale sector organisation EuroCommerce has issued a call for Member States to make sure goods can still be moved freely across the EU’s borders, despite controls brought in because of COVID-19. The trade body also called on consumers to avoid buying more than they need. In a statement* issued on Monday (March 16), Director-General of EuroCommerce, Christian Verschueren, paid tribute to the 29 million people in the sector, “who have been working extra hours & giving up holidays,” to provide services in these exceptional times.” Retailers & wholesalers had “been working with all parts of the supply chain to ensure that there are adequate supplies of the things European citizens need every day,” he continued. They had also taken steps to minimise the risk of infection to their staff, & the “millions of customers” with whom they are in daily contact. Verschueren supported calls to Commission President Ursula von der Leyen & Internal Market Commissioner Thierry Breton to keep EU internal borders open to “lorries carrying the goods that people need on a daily basis.” EuroCommerce says that, although its members have enough supplies ready, “this could be compromised if disproportionate measures are taken at country borders to make it impossible for deliveries from one Member State to another.” It also points out that in some border areas, staff live in one country & work in another. The umbrella organisation wants national authorities to “allow these employees to get to work & carry on serving customers.” The group also points out that their supply chains depend on “regular & smooth, on-time deliveries,” which “need to be maintained unless there are real risks involved.” It welcomes moves by authorities to waive normal competition rules to allow exchanges of information on supplies & arranging deliveries to people who are in self-isolation in their homes. EuroCommerce’s final message is to reinforce what governments have said to all Europeans that it was “not necessary to buy large amounts of daily necessities.” “Food retail shops remain open everywhere, albeit with some restrictions in some countries,” the group said. “Emptying the shelves of a product creates a vicious circle of panic buying, & that is a pattern of demand that makes replenishment more difficult.” The group appealed to consumers to “act with restraint & solidarity & leave some products for others who need them as well.” More details at www.eurocommerce.eu/

Farm to Fork Strategy: Delayed until Apr 29; Action Plan; COMENVI wants F2F presentation; F2F pushed back until April 29; The publication of the Farm to Fork Strategy has been pushed back until April 29* (rather than March 25), according to the latest College agenda circulating at the time of going to press (dated March 18). The Inter-Service Consultation finished up this week [see below] with DG SANTE officials now expected to incorporate input from the other Directorates-General, before consulting with them in the coming weeks. As most Commission staff now work from home, the postponement of the ‘big reveal’ will take some pressure off officials working on this file. The EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 is also due to be unveiled on April 29, as is an impact study on the current CAP (2014-2020).

Just before the Easter break, which runs from April 9-13, the EU’s executive is expected to table a ‘Report on the Impact of Demographic Change’ (led by Dubravka Šuica in charge of Democracy & Demography) on April 8 & ‘Stepping up our Engagement with the Western Balkans - The Commission’s contribution to the EU-Western Balkans Summit’ - scheduled to take place in Zagreb on May 7 - led by EU Foreign Affairs Chief Josep Borrell. In early May (6), the Commission will table an ‘Action Plan on Anti-Money Laundering’, launch of the 2nd stage consultation on ‘Fair minimum wages for workers in the EU’, ‘Updated Skills Agenda for Europe’ & a ‘Proposal for a Council Recommendation on Vocational Education & Training’ ahead of the Zagreb Summit (May 6-7) & the launch of the ‘Conference on the Future of Europe’ on May 9 (Europe Day). The ‘Enlargement Package’ is slated for May 12 (tbc) in the margins of the Strasbourg plenary session (May 11-14, if it goes ahead), as is the ‘Communication on Better Regulation’. A Communication on the ‘Future of Research & Innovation and the European Research Area’ is pencilled in for May 27 (tbc), while a ‘Strategy for smart sector integration’ is due on June 3, coinciding with the EU Green Week 2020 (June 1-5). *Information provided here is based on the latest College agenda, still subject to change as the COVID-19 situation evolves;
Slimmed down F2F ‘Action Plan’: Proposals for a “legislative framework for sustainable food systems” by 2023 - developed by SANTE - is floated in the latest draft of the ‘Action Plan’ accompanying the ‘Farm to Fork Strategy - For a Fair, Healthy, & environmentally-friendly food system,’ that went into the Inter-Service Consultation. In the slimmed-down Annex of 20 initiatives (just over 1 page) - with most falling under the remit of DG SANTE - officials also mull a proposal for a harmonised mandatory front-of-pack nutrition label to “enable consumers to make health conscious food choices,” & in a surprise move, plans to require “origin indication” for milk are in the pipeline as well as milk & meat as ingredients to “enable consumers to identify locally-produced food & stimulate short supply chains to the benefit of farmers.”

In a series of measures, officials refer to a revision of the Sustainable Use of Pesticides Directive to “significantly reduce use & dependency on pesticides & enhance Integrated Pest Management” by 2020-2022 (SANTE). They refer to a revision of the relevant implementing Regulations under the Plant Protection Products framework to facilitate placing on the market of PPPs “containing biological active substances” & a review of the pesticide statistics Regulation to overcome data gaps & reinforce evidence-based policy-making (ESStat). A “comprehensive plan” for integrated nutrient management to reduce the pollution from fertilisers inc. in agriculture is also on the cards (ENV/AGRI), with no indicative timeline provided. A review of existing animal welfare legislation is on the horizon inc. on animal transport, while SANTE will seek to table a proposal for a revision of the feed additives Regulation to reduce the environmental impact of livestock farming. DG COMP officials will be mandated to table initiatives to “support primary producers throughout the transition, inc. through the clarification of competition rules with regard to sustainability in collective actions,” while DG AGRI is poised to develop an ‘EU Carbon Farming manual’ to quantify emission reductions & carbon removals in farms & forestry systems.

In a bid to “stimulate sustainable food processing, wholesale, retail, hospitality & food services’ practices,” DG SANTE looks set to launch initiatives to stimulate reformulation of processed food, inc. the setting of maximum levels for certain nutrients & establishing nutrient profiles to restrict promotion of food high in salt, sugar &/or fat. SANTE officials would also revise Community legislation on Food Contact Materials to improve food safety, ensure citizens’ health & reduce the environmental footprint of the sector. Meanwhile, DGs GROW & ENVi would develop an “EU code & monitoring framework” for responsible & transparent business & marketing conduct in the food supply chain, while colleagues in AGRI/MARE would revise EU marketing standards for agricultural, fishery & aquaculture products to ensure “the uptake & supply of sustainable products.” Both SANTE & OLAF will work to enhance coordination to enforce single market rules & tackle food fraud (inc. through the extension of the Anti-Fraud Office’s investigative powers). The draft Annex floats proposals for EU-level targets for food waste reductions (by 2023) & for a revision of Community rules on date marking (‘use by’ & ‘best before’ dates) by 2024 (both developed by SANTE).

In the 14½-page draft Communication, any reference to reduction targets in the “use & risk of chemical pesticides by 2030” & the “use of high-risk pesticides by 2030” are still to be filled in (decision to be taken at political level in collaboration with Secretary General). But the Commission is poised to “enforce actions” to curb any delays in the pesticide approval process, officials note. Similarly the reduction target for fertilisers by 2030 is left blank. More details on the draft Communication will follow on Friday.

*DRAFT text still subject to change, following input from other DGs, usual caveats apply;

**COMENVI wants F2F presentation:** The Chair of the EP’s Environment Committee has called on Commission Executive Vice-President Frans Timmermans to arrange a presentation on the Farm to Fork Strategy to his members, “as soon as circumstances allow.” In a single page letter (dated March 13), & copied to Commissioners Janusz Wojciechowski (Agriculture & Rural Development) & Stella Kyriakides (Health & Food Safety), Pascal Canfin reminds the Socialist politician that ENVi leads on climate change & biodiversity policies & has competence on the issues of reducing use of pesticides, fertilisers & antibiotics. It also covers consumer information, notably on health & sustainability of food & also animal welfare. The Committee is playing a role in the development of the new CAP, “one of the key tools through which the Strategy’s actions will be delivered.” Because of those responsibilities, ENVi MEPs are “very much looking forward” to the Strategy’s publication on March 25 - now pushed back to April 29 [see above] - the Renew Europe euro-deputy tells the Commissioners. Insisting that “there is no time to lose,” the former head of the French section of WWF wants, “once the plan has been published,” a presentation on the Strategy, “in one of the upcoming regular ENVI Committee meetings.”

F2F: FARM, PESTICIDE & FERTILISER INDUSTRIES RESPOND; ORGANIC FARMING INPUT; F2F mustn’t slow CAP reform, say farm lobby: The EU’s largest farm lobby Copa-Cogeca has called for changes to be made under the forthcoming Farm to Fork Strategy (F2F), without slowing the adoption of a new CAP or creating additional administrative burdens. In their submission to the Commission’s public consultation on F2F [see AF14-20], which closed on March 16, the umbrella organisation stresses the work farmers are already doing to minimise the use of pesticides & fertilisers, but add that farm inputs remain a vital tool. The lobbyists ask that any reference to “new technologies & scientific discoveries,” under the Strategy include New Breeding Techniques, after the ECJ’s decision to include them with GMOs for the process of approval. Copa-Cogeca representatives urge policy-makers to “consider the potential of these

© AGRA-EUROPE Presse- und Informationsdienst 2020. Published by Agra-Europe (AgE), Bonn.
products to improve sustainability along the food chain." They also want to know how the industry is expected to “significantly reduce the use of pesticides & fertilisers,” in the absence of a list of “credible & realistic alternatives” in the recent Green Deal Communication [see AF96-19]. They stress the need for replacements for active substances “assessed negatively by EFSA,” noting the potential of bio-controls, innovative agronomic practices, resilient varieties or research into new markets. The Brussels-based group also explains that many farmers are cutting the use of pesticides by using integrated pest management techniques, combining methods such as “crop rotation, implementation of resistant cultivars, soil management, seed protection, etc.” “Nevertheless,” they insist, “pesticides will remain an essential element in IPM.” On fertilisers, lobbyists stress that the aim should be accuracy. “Precision & digital farming benefit agricultural activities by optimising the application of fertilisers & plant protection products,” they explain. Instead of setting a specific goal, advisory services or programmes targeting nutrient efficiency should be used, they outline, rejecting the idea of a legally-binding target for fertiliser reduction.

Turning to antimicrobial resistance, they insist on the importance of a “firm commitment to biosecurity & hygiene,” adding that “healthy animals do not need antimicrobials.” They point out that improving animal health is the best way to cut the use of the medicines. The contribution includes a plea for the Commission to show “how the ambition of the Green Deal & Farm to Fork Strategy will be mirrored in the CAP Strategic Plans from the outset.” They also want the EU’s executive to come up with a way to reward farmers for eco-schemes with a smaller budget, insisting that the “next legislative proposals,” presumably referring to the F2F, “should contribute to reducing the competitive disadvantages that exist today” because of differences in production standards between the EU & elsewhere. At the same stage, the proposals should “be based on the solid science-based risk analysis paradigm & the precautionary principle.” “We cannot have food security without food safety,” farm representatives state. That means, in their view, that “European production standards must be respected when it comes to trade & imports from 3rd countries.”

Livestock sector calls for tailored ‘Farm to Fork’: The forthcoming Farm to Fork Strategy must take the specific characteristics of the livestock sector into account, with a basis in facts about the industry & avoiding prescriptive rules, according to eleven organisations representing the EU’s livestock value chain. In an 8-page open letter* signed by all the member associations of the ‘European Livestock Voice’ (inc. 4-page Annex), dated early March, the coalition stresses the need to understand that “livestock production is so much more than just meat, fish, dairy & eggs,” providing valuable by-products for manufacturing as well as services to society, particularly in rural areas. They call for an acknowledgement that there is not a one-size-fits-all approach that will work. That means that “objective-driven legislation” should be favoured over “prescriptive rules.” Key performance indicators should include reduction targets which are “impacted oriented,” in the view of industry leaders, evaluating the “economic, environmental, animal health & welfare, & social performances of livestock systems.” The co-signatories want the EU’s executive to make sure that any new proposal to put ‘sustainable food systems’ into law is assessed to make sure it does not undermine current standards on animal health or feed & food safety. The correspondence to Commissioners & policymakers also includes a call to give facts priority over “opinions & tracking fake information.” The European Green Deal & Farm to Fork Strategy need, in their view, to “be a collective exercise with a fair share of not only benefits, but also efforts.” “All value stakeholders (inc. consumers), all systems must feel co-responsible & committed in the process so that it can be a fair & win-win exercise,” they insist. “We see it as a long journey requiring frequent evaluations of the performance of legislative & non-legislative initiatives, adapted to knowledge accumulation, innovations & technological developments.”


ECPA hopes for evidence not rhetoric in F2F: The European Crop Protection Association (ECPA) wants to see “a careful assessment of trade-offs, based on evidence not rhetoric,” under the Green Deal & the Farm to Fork Strategy. In its response to the Commission’s public consultation, ECPA representatives remind the EU’s executive that the industry has the tools to help farmers adapt to climate change & provide “the potential to innovate for carbon capture in agriculture.” The trade association says it hopes “for a well-reasoned, science-based discussion, with Commission proposals focused on a limited set of policy instruments to avoid a fragmentation of the rules across different legislations.” They also insist on the “need to accelerate innovation for the critical challenges ahead.” Farmers are going to “require more innovative tools to control new threats from mycotoxins & invasive alien species, as predicted by EFSA.” The sector is ready to commit to supporting the Commission’s agenda, “especially in the areas of Circular Economy, R&D investment for greener ways to protect crops & training of end-users of our products to ensure they are used properly & only when necessary.” The group points out that Community legislation “quite rightly ensures that our products may only be sold where there is no harmful effect on people & no unacceptable impact on the environment, & should only be used when needed,” but also recognises “societal concerns” & acknowledge
the Commission’s “willingness to reduce both risk & use.” ECPA views the Commission’s harmonised risk indicator 1 (HRI 1) as a reasonable way to measure hazard reduction from pesticides, even though “this will be very challenging for us to deliver on.” The organisation wants any proposal for HRI targets to use a baseline made from the average index in 2014-2017, so that it reflects the variability of pesticide use. The association encourages the Commission to “consider adding an indicator that also measures the consequences that farmers will face if no alternative solutions are brought on time to the market.” While supporting the role of organic in the mix of agricultural systems & the Commission’s aim to increase the level of organic production, ECPA says that there are “ecological trade-offs implied by an increase of organic agriculture.” These include an increase in pesticide use “as some products commonly used in organic farming need to be applied in much larger quantities than low rate chemical alternatives ... more agricultural land is needed to maintain the same level of productivity & more greenhouse gas emissions are likely due to more interventions in the fields.” They would welcome the “creation of a specific indicator linked to the use of pesticides in organic agriculture.”

**Fertilizers Europe opposes arbitrary limits:** Fertilizers Europe, the industry’s European lobby, has urged the Commission to avoid arbitrary limits on the use of its members’ products, pushing instead the idea of “increasing the efficiency of the nutrients used.” In its response to the Commission’s public consultation on the Farm to Fork Strategy [see AF14-20], Fertilizers Europe reminds the EU’s executive of the importance of looking at all the sources of nutrients available to plants, including organic fertilisers such as slurry or processed manure, as well as mineral fertilisers. “Without the addition of essential plant nutrients, agricultural soils would be depleted, or current production levels would be drastically reduced,” representatives outline. Instead of a limit on use, the trade association proposes the inclusion of a target seeking to increase Nitrogen Use Efficiency (NUE) by 10% by 2030, using a 2014 baseline. “With equal production, this corresponds to a reduction in use of about 10% EU-wide,” they add, claiming the idea would lead to the more efficient use of fertilisers & avoid distortions of competition between Member States. “Fertilisers are integral to modern agriculture,” the lobby organisation insists.

**IFOAM EU seeks ambitious organic targets:** IFOAM EU has called for a target of 20% organic land by 2030 (on average in the EU), which it says is “both ambitious & achievable” provided it is linked to the CAP. In its submission to the consultation on the Farm to Fork Strategy, the organic movement would also like to see an EU-wide target of 20% organic produce in public kitchens by the end of this decade “in line with the push-pull approach that has been successful in Denmark.” The latter could be achieved through Green Public Procurement (GPP) & promotion policies, IFOAM EU representatives outline, describing it as an “effective way to develop the whole organic production chain (retailers, traders, processors) & to give a prominent role to local authorities in the Farm to Fork Strategy.” In the latest draft of the F2F, organic farming targets in terms of area, as defined in the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030, are left blank. The umbrella organisation is part of the EU food policy coalition, which supports “shifts to more sustainable diets with more plant-based products, less intensive animal production, & innovative governance models for the F2F”. The movement would like to see greater synergies between the F2F, the Biodiversity Strategy & CAP reform “to acknowledge the contribution of organic farming to the EU objectives of the Green Deal & support it accordingly.” The forthcoming Strategy “should build on the success of organic farming & its potential to transform agriculture to provide EU citizens with a credible & engaging vision for a sustainable food production system in 2030,” they add.

**Entries open for Farming by Satellite Prize 2020:** The European Global Navigation Satellite Systems Agency (GSA), declared the Farming by Satellite Prize* open for entries on March 16. The GSA is the Prague-based agency, which manages the European navigation satellite systems EGNOS & Galileo. The prize is a joint initiative with the European Environment Agency (EEA) based in Copenhagen. It is open to young innovators, to explore the use of satellite technology in agriculture to improve sustainability, efficiency & environmental performance, using EGNOS, Galileo or the Copernicus Land Monitoring Service, which is managed by the EEA. Also included in the 2020 prize is a Special Africa Prize, which is designed to encourage young Africans to look for satellite-based solutions in agriculture. EEA Executive Director, Hans Bruyninckx, stressed that satellite data, technology & innovation can support a move to more sustainable agriculture with a lower impact on the environment & climate, “which is why partnering with this initiative aligns well with the EEA’s commitment to protecting our nature, climate & human health.” GSA Acting Executive Director Pascal Claudel added that “we need young farmers to be innovative to develop a competitive & yet sustainable agriculture.” The aim of the competition was to “support them to reach the best possible solution.” Applicants can take part as individuals or as a team. They have until midday on June 15 to get their entries in. Up to 40 will then be invited to continue into a ‘Deep Dive Phase’ ending on Sept 30. Finally, a smaller group of at most ten entrants for Europe & three for Africa, will go to a stage with live pitches, for the European entries, or pitches by video-conference, for those from Africa, before an awards ceremony in Nov/Dec. The prize is sponsored by farm machinery maker Claas.

*For more details go to www.farmingbysatellite.eu

**ENDS**