



Dairy Focus 01/2024

Belgian EU Presidency

Uniting dairy excellence & ambition

The Kingdom of Belgium, a founding member of the European Economic Community back in 1958, will hold the EU Presidency for the thirteenth time this year. The past shows that Belgium has – very much based on its national experience - an unrivalled capacity to find constructive and future proof compromises at EU level. The main focus of the Belgian Presidency in this first half of 2024 will be on the geopolitical situation, with the ongoing Russian aggression in Ukraine and other geopolitical hotspots unfolding their catastrophic potential.

'EU internally', the Belgian Presidency has to conclude the 2019 – 2024 legislative term – with quite some 'agri dossiers' still to be finalized, before handing the Presidency over to Hungary end of June 2024, just three weeks after the elections of the European Parliament.

There are several important legislations for our sector that have to be brought to a successful conclusion during the next six months: We hope to see the **School Food Scheme** text approved, that focusses on the nutritional value of milk and dairy. We are waiting for an **EU Promotion Policy** text, that acknowledges the quality excellence of European agri-food production in all product categories. And we are confident that the revision of the **Marketing Standards** can be finalized under the Belgian Presidency.

Quite some 'landmark' projects like the Framework for Sustainable Food System(s) or the Food Information to Consumers (FIC) revision) from the **EU Green Deal** agenda are delayed within the EU Commission and not yet published.

Other initiatives are now with the co-legislators: the **Green Claims Directive** will need to recognize our PEF (Product Environmental Footprint) methodology and we count on the Belgian Presidency to defend the milk and dairy basket within the discussions on the **Packaging and Packaging Waste Directive**.

From our meeting with Belgian Vice Prime Minister **David Clarinval** at our EDA Annual Convention in November 2023 in Brussels, our take-away is clear: Belgium is highly committed to make the EU Presidency a success story for Belgium, for our Union and for the European *lactopshère*.



We are looking forward to the Belgian EU Presidency that will implement the Green Deal initiatives in balancing out the environmental, social and economic volet of the sustainability concept.



Giuseppe Ambrosi

Alexander Anton

EDA President

EDA Secretary general

BCZ-CBL Foreword



BCZ-CBL President Catherine Pycke and EDA President Giuseppe Ambrosi



Federal Minister for Agriculture David Clarinval and EDA President Giuseppe Ambrosi

'More dialogue and debate' was one of the key messages President of the European Commission von der Leyen gave during the Agri-Food Days end of 2023 when she spoke about the many challenges, but also possible solutions for the EU agri-food sector. With a view to a future-proof and resilient agri-food sector, the Belgian Presidency indicates that it will strive to tackle those challenges in a holistic manner by means of a cross-chain and cross-disciplinary approach.

As the Belgian Dairy Association (BCZ-CBL) we strongly support this approach, and we could not agree more that complex challenges should be addressed in a holistic manner. BCZ-CBL believes in a bright future for the Belgian -and by extension European- dairy sector, albeit with a whole host of challenges and their countless associated opportunities. We are convinced that the best approach to these challenges is cooperation and dialogue. The Belgian Presidency of the Council of the European Union is an excellent opportunity to strengthen the dialogues of BCZ-CBL with both Belgian and European institutions.

Food safety first

Food safety is indisputably the absolute priority for the food industry. However, maintaining the high standards currently met in Belgium and Europe requires continuous efforts from food companies. In the current context where food companies constantly face multiple challenges (more sustainable production, disruptions in the supply chain, inflation,...) there is the need to have a food safety culture in each company throughout the food chain. BCZ-CBL welcomes and fully supports that the Belgian presidency will address the importance of food safety culture during its presidency.

Committed to sustainable food systems

The Belgian Presidency sees the further improving of the sustainability of the food system as necessary from an economic, social and environmental perspective. Therefore, they focus on pathways towards the equal sharing of costs, benefits and risks associated with the transition to a sustainable food system throughout the food chain. The Belgian Presidency will continue to strive for a level-playing field and to harmonise regulations. These are points BCZ-CBL can't but salute.

Dairy as part of a sustainable diet

The agri-food industry faces the challenge of feeding the world's growing population, while further reducing its environmental and climate impact. Dairy provides not only high-quality proteins but also various vitamins and minerals including vitamin B12 and calcium by nature. BCZ-CBL is thankful for the acknowledgement we receive from the Belgium Presidency on our efforts and results we have achieved in reformulating dairy products to even improve nutritional quality (e.g. by reducing the amount of added sugar). Either way, the nutritional richness of dairy products and their positive health effects cannot be summarized in a letter or colour-coded system. As such, BCZ-CBL urges the Belgian Presidency to take the nutrient richness of dairy products into account when they share experiences on voluntary front-of-pack labelling systems. Of course, BCZ-CBL welcomes the initiatives of the Belgian Presidency to promote healthy food choices, e.g. in schools.



Moreover, a recent FAO study flagged that countries with efficient production, could make a major contribution to the climate if they were to produce more dairy for the global market. Indeed, the carbon footprint of our milk is among the lowest worldwide. As such, our nutrient rich, natural dairy products have many assets in contributing to feed the world, whilst respecting the planetary boundaries. BCZ-CBL is counting on the Belgian Presidency to take these insights into account in their work.

Paving the way for the CAP post 2027

In a time when sustainability is at the centre of discussions in the policymaking process, the current CAP not only aims at creating food sovereignty, fostering the competitiveness of EU agriculture, providing a safety net for farmers in times of crises and achieving a balanced development of rural communities, but also at ensuring the sustainable management of natural resources and climate action. As such the European agricultural sector becomes more integrated into the European Green Deal ambitions, which BCZ fully supports. The Belgian Presidency not only wants to ensure an efficient and effective follow-up to the implementation of the CAP, but in addition will already initiate reflections on a future, post-2027 framework. BCZ-CBL very much welcomes these efforts and expects the Belgian Presidency to take into account to the position paper EDA prepares in this regard.

Open Strategic Autonomy

The Belgian Presidency is committed to ensuring food security and autonomy within a harmonised European food policy. In that context, it will promote an Open Strategic Autonomy. BCZ-CBL welcomes that the Belgian Presidency commits to work on strategic autonomy on the one hand, without losing attention for the growing global

food insecurity on the other hand. Furthermore, the Belgian Presidency promises to address trade-related issues and to pay particular attention to policy coherence in that regard. BCZ-CBL welcomes this intention since trade is an important motor of the Belgian dairy industry. Although Belgian dairies mostly produce for the internal market, many of the market growth potential is expected from the growing economies around the world. New free trade agreements can help our dairy companies to seize these promising opportunities. In any case, trade disputes with third countries are to be avoided and trade barriers are to be lifted through intense dialogue with the importing party.

BCZ-CBL looks forward to further strengthen – together with EDA- the dialogues with both Belgian and European institutions in the upcoming months!



Lien Callewaert

Director BCZ-CBL

Priorities of the Belgian EU Presidency



Federal Minister for Agriculture, David Clarinval

Federal Minister for Agriculture David Clarinval outlines his priorities for the Belgian Presidency of the Council of European Agriculture Ministers in 2024

From 1 January 2024, Belgium will preside over the Council of the European Union. This will be the thirteenth time that Belgium will take on this important role, which was last held in 2010. The timing of this Presidency is delicate, as the European elections will take place on June 9th 2024: this means that the European Parliament will complete its work at the end of April and that the timeframe for closing trilogues will be very limited. At the same time however, Belgium has the ambition to complete as many files as possible under the motto protect, strengthen and repair. Minister David Clarinval is determined to make progress, and is presenting his priorities to us, as he will be chairing the Council of European Agriculture Ministers in his capacity as Belgian Federal Minister for Agriculture.

Strategic autonomy in agriculture and food sovereignty

Firstly, Belgium is keen to work on strategic autonomy in the field of agriculture and food sovereignty and to analyse solutions to growing global food insecurity caused by economic crises, conflicts and climate change. "These issues have been at the forefront since the war in Ukraine, and we are convinced that they will be omnipresent in 2024. This is particularly important for dairy products, as inflation has come down, but remains high for food products", the Minister points out. Indeed, the price of raw milk has fallen sharply in recent months, and the prices of the main dairy products have also fallen, but appear to have sta-

bilised. "To guarantee food security, the Common Agricultural Policy is crucial. That's why we want to start thinking about the new CAP post 2027".

Encouraging innovation

Secondly, Belgium will include innovation in its programme, in particular with the introduction of new genomic techniques or digital technologies: "These innovations are crucial to the transition to a more sustainable sector. Agriculture is facing many challenges, and it is with these innovations that the agricultural sector will be more sustainable and that the EU will remain competitive". The Minister also underlined the specific characteristics of the dairy industry: "The dairy industry is linked to innovation. The sector is constantly evolving and many innovations have been introduced in recent years, such as the considerable reduction in the added sugar content in its products in recent years.

These innovations have helped to improve the quality of milk while meeting consumer needs.

Animal health

Belgium intends to make animal health a priority during its Presidency, by continuing to work on the introduction of preventive measures such as biosecurity and vaccination in animal production. David Clarinval explains: "I am convinced that these two additional tools must become the pillars of alternative strategies to mass slaughter in the management of infectious epidemics on farms. The commercial stakes of vaccination at international level are also important in these discussions. In this way, we can continue the work of our French colleagues.

In this context, antimicrobial resistance will also be a priority. In recent years, the agricultural sector has made significant efforts to reduce the use of antibiotics, with very good results. The Presidency's reflections will aim to build on these efforts and instil the same momentum in human health and the environment. Belgium also has the ambition of organising an exchange of best European practices in protein self-sufficiency. "The development of these cultures would create new economic opportunities for farmers, by securing farm supplies and limiting their exposure to price volatility," concludes the Minister.

Transitioning the production system towards sustainability

Finally, Belgium wants to put on the table the transition of our food production system towards greater sustainability. The costs associated with this transition must be spread across the entire value chain, not just the farmers. We therefore need to strengthen the position of farmers in the value chain.

As far as the legislative dossiers as such are concerned, Belgium wants to be able to make as much progress as possible to achieve good results.

Firstly, the work of the Spanish Presidency on the regulation on the sustainable use of pesticides and new genomic techniques must continue to be monitored.

Secondly, the introduction of digital labelling for fertilisers at EU level is also an important issue. This is a first step towards digital labelling in other areas related to the agri-food sector.

As far as forests are concerned, our aim is to complete discussions on the observation framework proposed by the Commission and on the implementation of the forestry strategy.



Delara Pouya, spokesperson of Minister Clarinval.

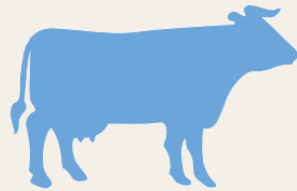
Niels Timmermans, spokesperson of the Belgian Presidency.



The Belgian Dairy Sector

11.59 mio

inhabitants



543,680

dairy cows



6,065

dairy farms



€7.1

bn

In Revenue



€ 488

mio

Trade Balance



≈4.3

bio liters

milk delivered



Main exports:

**cheese, milk/
cream and butter**

The Belgian dairy sector in figures

Source:

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eda



EDA Policy Conference

Focus on the European Elections 2024

Wednesday 10th April 2024, Brussels



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EDA Annual Convention 2024



Rome, Italy

13th - 15 November
2024

Hosted by

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