

The European Commission yesterday announced a €500 million (US\$558 million) package for farmers affected by the Russian ban, aimed predominantly at dairy farmers. 

In the absence of European Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development Phil Hogan, who was suddenly taken ill and could not attend the meeting where the announcement was made, vice president Jyrki Katainen gave a speech outlining new measures to support European farmers.

He spoke of the measures taken to date and set out a series of new measures to support the agriculture industry throughout Europe, including the new support package.

"In response to recent market developments, the Commission has identified a comprehensive package of measures which we believe are the most appropriate and which will have the greatest effect in supporting producers," he said.

"The measures I am announcing look to the immediate needs of farmers. In addition, they also include a longer-term view to improve future conditions, notable with regard to the food chain.

"This package will allow for €500 million of EU funds to be used for the benefits of farmers immediately. This is a robust and decisive response. This response demonstrates that the Commission takes its responsibility towards farmers very seriously and is prepared to back it up with appropriate funds.

Katainen also highlighted that since August 2014, the EU had spent €150 million withdrawing 760,000 metric tons (MT) of fruit and vegetables from the market.

Angry demonstrations

As the agricultural meeting was taking place in Brussels yesterday, a demonstration of farmers got out of hand as riot police were called in armed with water cannons.

An estimated 6,000 European farmers, from France, the U.K., Germany, the Netherlands, Spain and Belgium, took part in the Copa Cogeca-organized protest.

Many took to the streets in tractors, bringing traffic to a standstill in parts of the city.

In some incidences, angry farmers set off fireworks, blocked streets with vehicles and pelted police with eggs and milk, prompting riot officers to set off water canons to control the crowds.

Meanwhile, inside the government building agricultural ministers gathered for an extraordinary meeting to discuss the continuing negative impact of the Russian import embargo on the fresh produce, livestock and milk sectors across the EU.

European producers have faced a serious decline in sales since the Russian embargo took hold, and were demanding more action from the EC.

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