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Agricultural Priorities of the Polish Presidency

The reform of the Common Agricultural Policy after 2013 and issues related to improving the competitiveness of EU agriculture—these are the main priorities of the Polish presidency of the Council of the European Union in terms of agriculture.

Agriculture was a prominent topic during the first three months of Poland's turn at the rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union. Over this time several meetings of the Council of EU Ministers for Agriculture and Fisheries were held, as well as many meetings focusing on selected problems of EU agriculture.

On presenting the priorities of the Polish presidency in Brussels, Poland's Agriculture and Rural Development Minister Marek Sawicki said that Poland's six-month presidency will primarily focus on reforming the Common Agricultural Policy after 2013 and on discussions on improving the competitiveness of EU agriculture by diversifying the sources of income in agriculture and developing renewable energy sources in rural areas.

Unveiling the program, Sawicki stressed the importance that the Polish presidency attaches to animal welfare issues. In the fall, the European Commission is expected to release a report on this matter. In his statement, Sawicki also referred to what are called phytosanitary issues because regulations in this area are over 30 years old and in need of revision. EU regulations on the marketing of seeds and plant propagating material also need to be modernized and simplified. "The EU needs a harmonized and competitive market for high-quality seeds and propagating material," said Sawicki. "At the same time we must protect the environment and take into account the ongoing globalization process and international standards." The Polish presidency also wants to press ahead with work on documentation concerning genetically modified organisms (GMOs), aiming to prepare the ground for the launch of three-way talks with the European Parliament in this area.

Sawicki also said that the Council welcomed a resolution adopted by the European Parliament in May on the Commission's Green Paper on forest protection and on information on EU forests. "The good condition and sustainability of European forests, along with better information on forest resources in Europe, will be the key to better preparing our forests for the challenges posed by climate change," said Sawicki.

One of the highlights of the first Council of EU Ministers for Agriculture and Fisheries, chaired by Marek Sawicki, was a presentation by the European Commissioner for Fisheries, Maria Damanaki, of a proposal for reforming the

Common Fisheries Policy. According to the European Commission, a key component of the proposed reform is to ensure sustainable management of fisheries, which means fishing in a way that will not endanger the reproduction of fish herds but provide fishermen with adequate income in the long term.

In their preliminary comments on the shape of the reform, EU ministers referred to the rules proposed by the Commission for eliminating discards in European fisheries (throwing tons of unwanted fish back into the sea), in addition to the compulsory introduction of long-term concessions for fishing, regionalization of the decision-making process, and ensuring appropriate conditions for the development of aquaculture. They also talked about linking the objectives of the reform with the new European Fisheries Fund (EFF). A reform of the Common Fisheries Policy is a priority for the Polish presidency because it will establish the general principles for the sector's operations in the years to come.

At the meeting of the Council, the European Commission also unveiled its "Green Paper on promotion measures and information provision for agricultural products," which will kick off a debate on changing the shape of the policy. For the Polish presidency, this is an extremely important issue because the promotion of European agri-food products on EU markets and beyond is essential for ensuring the competitiveness of European agriculture.

Issues related to the promotion of agri-food products were also the topic of an informal meeting of EU agriculture ministers in the southwestern Polish city of Wrocław in September. Meanwhile, the coastal resort of Sopot hosted a conference on the use of agricultural biomass for the production of energy. The conference marked the start of pan-European debate on this issue. European societies have turned their attention to opportunities for the development of rural areas resulting from the use of biomass. The use of agricultural waste is a tool to diversify the sources of income in agriculture and is expected to contribute to improving the security of energy supply.

As part of the Polish presidency, an informal meeting of senior rural development officials was held near the eastern city of Supraśl in late September. The meeting was organized by the Polish Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. The main subject of the meeting was complementary investment assistance in the development of rural areas, combined with respect for public goods and the exchange of best practices in carrying out rural development programs in EU countries.

In September, a Conference of Directors of EU Paying Agencies was also held in Sopot. Organized by the Polish paying agencies, the Agricultural Market Agency, and the Agency for Restructuring and Modernization of Agriculture, the conference was attended by the heads of EU paying agencies and agricultural sector institutions from EU member and candidate countries, as well as representatives from EU institutions such as the European Commission, the European Court of Auditors, and the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF).

A.R.

Polish Apples in Brussels

Members of the European Parliament recently had a chance to sample Polish apples as part of the "Polska Tastes Good!" promotional campaign for Polish food.

The tasting of Polish apples from the Łącko Valley took place at the end of September at the European Parliament and European Council headquarters in Brussels. The apples, known for their slightly tart taste and firm flesh, were brought by Polish Agriculture Minister Marek Sawicki. A total of 12,000 apples were served to Eurodeputies and others participating in a meeting of the EU Council of Ministers Responsible for Agriculture and Fisheries and members of task forces that convened at the Council building.

The apples were a hit with Eurodeputies from different countries and also delighted

the palates of Jerzy Buzek, the president of the European Parliament, and Dacian Ciolos, the EU Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development.

In 2010, the European Commission added apples from the Łącko Valley to its list of Protected Geographical Indications. The highly distinct flavor of the apples and their unique quality make them popular with consumers. The apples have a taste that is more tart and have a more intense blush than most other varieties.

The apple tasting in Brussels was part of the "Polska Tastes Good!" campaign designed to promote quality Polish food and make European buyers realize the outstand-



Marek Sawicki and Jerzy Buzek

ing quality of Polish food. In July, members of the European Parliament in Strasbourg were treated to Polish strawberries from the Kashubia region, which, like the apples from Łącko, have been designated as a Protected Geographical Indication. The tasty and aromatic strawberries heralded the start of the Polish presidency of the EU Council. A.R.



Dacian Ciolos and Marek Sawicki

Regional and Traditional Products

Nadwiślanka Cherry

Wiśnia nadwiślanka, a cherry variety grown in six districts in Poland located on the Vistula River halfway through its course, is the first food product from Poland's Świętokrzyskie province to be registered by the European Commission as a Protected Designation of Origin.



The distinctive features of the *nadwiślanka* cherry include its high extract, which is the total amount of water-soluble compounds (mainly sugars), strong aroma and intense color from anthocyanines, a type of antioxidants that release free radicals and are known to possess anti-cancer properties. *Nadwiślanka* cherries are smaller than fruit produced by other popular cherry varieties. The juice has a stronger color and more sour taste. After the stalk is removed, a little juice flows out and sets into a jelly, extending the shelf life of the fruit compared with other varieties. Owing to their higher extract and greater acidity than those of other cherry varieties, *nadwiślanka* cherries are excellent to make cherry concentrate, as less fruit is needed to ensure a better color and scent.

The *nadwiślanka* cherry is a local variety of the juice cherry that has been adapted to the soils of the Vistula valley, rich in lime and a mixture of lime and clay. *Nadwiślanka* is grown in the districts of Ożarów, Tarłów, Annopol, Lipsko,

Siemno and Solec nad Wisłą. Its former names include *ślupska*, *ślupianka* and *ślupiec*, from the village of Słupia Nadbrzeżna, where the first offshoot cherry trees were planted in the early 20th century by Teofil Zając from Słupia Nadbrzeżna. He probably bought the seedlings from a landowner named Leszczyński. In all likelihood, they were specially selected seedlings of the ground cherry, some specimens of which still grow in the area.

Seeing the potential offered by the delicious fruit, in 1925 Zając encouraged Jan Krupa, the principal of a school in Słupia Nadbrzeżna, to have his students plant cherry trees along the road to the nearby village of Tadeuszów. That proved a great way to advertise the new variety, which soon spread along the Vistula River, hence the name *Nadwiślanka* (derived from "on the Vistula"). *Nadwiślanka* cherry orchards flourished the fastest between the two world wars, driven by enormous interest from merchants. The cherry has since been extremely popular, both fresh and as a component of fruit preserves.

The growing area occupied by *nadwiślanka* cherry plantings forced growers to seek new ways to distribute the product. Large quantities were transported by a ship regularly plying the waters from Sandomierz in the Świętokrzyskie region to Warsaw, where the cherry was highly popular.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the *nadwiślanka* variety attracted the attention of buyers in Germany, who were particularly taken by its intensive color. Another tide of interest came in the 1990s when Denmark's Vallo Saft company opened a fruit and vegetable processing plant in Sandomierz. The company regarded *nadwiślanka* as a good substitute for a fine Danish cherry variety which had similar properties. The interest from the Danes prompted the locals to start planting lots of *nadwiślanka* trees in their orchards again. After the Danish company, the cherry caught the interest of French company Materne, whose Polish subsidiary, Materne Polska, processes the fruit into a range of products including cherry *compote*.

The application for the *nadwiślanka* cherry to be registered as a Protected Designation of Origin was submitted by the Nadwiślanka Cooperative of Fruit and Vegetable Producers in Ożarów, Świętokrzyskie province. The cooperative buys 25 percent of all *nadwiślanka* cherry yields to produce juice and syrup.

A.R.



The *Polska... tastes good!* special section—published by WV Marketing sp. z o. o.
in association with Warsaw Voice SA in a project co-financed by
the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. Address: 30 Wspólna St., 00-930 Warsaw
www.minrol.gov.pl





Common Agricultural Policy Reform and Polish Priorities

By **Marek Sawicki, PhD,**
Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development

The European Commission has unveiled its plans for reforming the Common Agricultural Policy. But Agriculture Commissioner Dacian Ciolos's proposal can hardly be called a reform.

With full responsibility and, unfortunately, regret, I have to say that the legislative package announced in mid-October is not a reform in any sense of the word. All it does is attempt to make cosmetic changes.

There's nothing in the proposal that could point to a desire to move away from the current stagnation and toward a development policy based on promoting competition. Many new administrative burdens have been proposed, which is contrary to the expectations of all the ministers as well as most European politicians—and thus hampers the simplification of the Common Agricultural Policy.

I would like to note that the situation in which the European Commission—while seeing the need to establish new criteria for allocating funds and evening out payment levels—is proposing that this leveling-out is in fact spread over a period of 14 years, adds an ironic twist to the debate that has been going on in this area for two years. It's an ironic twist because everyone was expecting that the single European market would be based on the principle of not interfering with competition, which would also apply to politicians. By maintaining an unequal level of payments, this principle is strongly undermined. The situation in which the European Commission acknowledges that it is necessary to move away from the historical criteria of eligibility for payments and replace these with new entitlement criteria, adds another ironic twist to the debate. How else can one describe that? After all, farmers who 20 years ago obtained their historic rights to the payments on the basis of the reference crop yields at the time, or on the basis of their dairy and beef cattle herds, will now have these transformed into new rights, which will be detached from the farm and convertible into securities.

The overriding question is if taxpayers' money spent on the Common Agricultural Policy is supposed to take the form of securities for the farmer, owner or leaseholder, but not tied to the farm or production process? Is the idea of direct payments—30 percent of which would be “green,” or in other words conditional on whether the farmer protects the environment or not—a simplification? After all, all European farmers will have to meet the same requirements, but farmers in the Baltic states will be getting just over 10 euros, Polish farmers around 50 euros, and Greek or Maltese farmers 180 euros for the same tasks.

All this explains why I will be expecting not only a profound debate, but also a revision of the package. I will be strongly urging other member states to do the same. I have no doubt that Europe can afford to make its Common Agricultural Policy a policy of growth and development, and not a policy of stagnation, and prove that it is more than just an easy way of redistributing EU contributions.

Nor does the European Commission's proposal, alas, provide an answer to the new challenges. It can be clearly seen that European Commission officials still have their minds back in the 1980s and 1990s—when Europe was struggling with an overproduction of food—and are refusing to acknowledge that the world's population is set to double by the end of the century.

If the Common Agricultural Policy reform were approached in terms of the purpose that this policy should serve, not in terms of allocating funds and maintaining the existing system of benefits, we would certainly be dealing with one of the more active policies in the EU, one designed to support economic growth. Paradoxically, however, the crisis which is beginning to knock so hard on the doors of individual countries may change the way of thinking.

I highlighted this kind of risks while referring to the report by German Eurodeputy Albert Dess. This explains why, during an informal meeting in Wrocław of EU ministers for agriculture and fisheries, I came up with the proposal that, in the context of the new tasks resulting from the Lisbon Treaty, the debate be held in public with the participation of the European Commission, European Parliament and representatives of farmers and specialists.

Speaking about the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy, it is necessary to mention other activities undertaken in the EU. Recently there has been a lot of talk about helping the poor. I'm critical about the proposal to reduce funds for this purpose fivefold. This mechanism has worked well for 20 years, and I believe that today, at a time of crisis, this program should continue at the current level, because even in the richest countries there is no shortage of those on the edge of poverty. To my mind, reducing funds contradicts the idea of solidarity.

There has also been discussion about the so-called quality package. I am convinced that this is a good idea that will make it possible to label, regional, local and traditional products in a better way. This will meet the expectations of consumers, who are increasingly eager to buy such products, praising them for their distinctive features, quality and taste. This diversity and richness of flavors testifies to Europe's culinary heritage, which should be not only protected but also supported and promoted. ■