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NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Council
Subject:	Impact and consequences of the spread of the bluetongue virus – feasibility of the use of the CAP crisis reserve - Information from the Belgian delegation

Delegations will find in the Annex a note received from the Belgian delegation on the above-mentioned subject, to be dealt with under "Any other business" at the meeting of the "Agriculture and Fisheries" Council on 23 September 2024.

Impact and consequences of the spread of the bluetongue virus – feasibility of the use of the CAP crisis reserve

In July 2024, a first case of Bluetongue serotype 3 (BTV-3) of the current vector season was confirmed in Belgium. Since then, nationwide more than 2.000 new outbreaks have been diagnosed. As the situation currently stands, BTV is affecting both sheep and cattle farms with a total estimated economic loss of 12.9 million euro's till the end of August.

Many farms are facing high mortality rates and a reduced production caused by animals displaying clinical symptoms such as fever and inflammation. Above the aforementioned problems that farms are facing, there is considerable economical damage resulting from, among others, additional labour costs for care, growth delays resulting in higher feed costs, as well as infertility issues, abortions and foetal deformities.

For **the sheep sector**, the first data estimates that the financial losses, due to direct losses from mortality, are at 1.935.000 €¹ till the end of August. Given that BTV infection numbers have risen since then, it is clear that these numbers do not yet provide a complete picture of the current situation and are likely to keep on rising. It is worth noting that sheep farmers who have been affected by BTV have already incurred substantial losses relative to their annual gross revenue. Linked to the sheep sector, there is also the effect of BTV on the prices and supply of **lamb**, which have already been under pressure since last year. The current evolution and spread of BTV are likely to worsen the current shortage in supply not only for Belgium, but also for the whole of Northwest Europe.

¹ Combined numbers of Flanders and Wallonia. The estimated losses in Flanders are currently 1.200.000 euros and in Wallonia 735.00 euros.

As for **the dairy sector**, preliminary data indicates a decrease in milk deliveries, for which experts indicate the existence of a causal relationship between the decline in milk deliveries in August and the outbreak of BTV. So far, there has been a decrease in milk deliveries in Belgium in August 2024 compared to August 2023, which also stands in contrast with the first six months of 2024, that is estimated so far to have resulted in a financial loss of 5.700.000 euros.²

Apart from financial losses resulting from the decline in milk deliveries, data also indicates an excess **cattle mortality (both dairy and beef cattle)**, resulting in estimated financial losses of 5.270.000 euros so far in Belgium.³ Similar as for the estimated losses in the sheep sector, these figures only cover August and do not provide a complete picture of the current situation.

Belgium invites the European Commission to closely monitor the further development of the situation regarding BTV and take the necessary measures on EU level in order to address this epidemic, that is rapidly spreading and affecting multiple Member States.

Given the urgency of the current situation and the impact on the Belgian farmers, Belgium kindly urges the European Commission to analyse the feasibility of the use of the European CAP crisis reserve in order to address this crisis, aid the affected farmers and combat further spread of the bluetongue virus. Belgium will also send an official request to European Commissioner for Agriculture, Janusz Wojciechowski, requesting the Commission to analyse the feasibility of financial support, provided with a more detailed overview of the current estimated losses.

² Combined numbers of Flanders and Wallonia. The estimated losses in Flanders are currently 2.500.000 euros and in Wallonia 3.200.000 euros.

³ Combined numbers of Flanders and Wallonia. The estimated losses in Flanders are currently 2.600.000 euros and in Wallonia 2.670.000 euros.