

The European Parliament voted in support of reform of the Common Agricultural Policy

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Strasbourg – The European Parliament voted for a reform of the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). The new reform plans a clearer link between funding and the implementation of environmental requirements, but critics believe that this link is insufficient and that exemptions for large industrial agribusinesses will continue.

The agricultural budget, amounting to 387 billion euro for the period from 2021 to 2027, is the second largest in the overall EU budget.

The majority of Members of the European Parliament voted on Tuesday in support of the amendments, which aim to make agriculture in Europe more environmentally friendly and fairer.

In future, a certain share of agricultural funds must be linked to environmental requirements. The reform will require 20% of farmers' payments in 2023–2024 to be spent on “eco-schemes”, with the share increasing to 25% for 2025–2027.

In addition, farmers with smaller holdings are to be granted targeted support. At least 10% of CAP funds will be directed to smaller farms, and all payments to farmers will be conditional upon compliance with environmental rules.

A permanent crisis reserve of 450 million euro is intended to support farmers in times of price volatility and unstable markets.

Parliament and the Member States agreed on the reform at the end of June after difficult negotiations. Final approval from both sides was still pending thereafter. Following Parliament, the Council must now give the green light, which is only a matter of time. The new rules will enter into force in 2023. The new rules, which will apply from 2023, are intended to redirect funds towards nature conservation and to reduce by 10% the greenhouse gases emitted by agriculture in the EU.

EU Commissioner for Agriculture Janusz Wojciechowski said: “It was a difficult compromise, but I think it is the best compromise that could be achieved.” He spoke of a “good result” that can ensure “the transition to more sustainable agriculture”.

The Green Deal is likely to lead to lower agricultural yields

Criticism

Critics believe that the reform will not succeed in linking direct payments to mandatory minimum environmental standards to the necessary extent. Moreover, the largest industrial agribusinesses will continue to benefit from financial resources, since the upper limit for direct payments requested by the European Parliament is also not sufficiently regulated. Therefore, in their view, the transition to sustainable, environmentally friendly and regional agriculture is rather questionable.

And according to a study by Wageningen University in the Netherlands, the measures intended to combat climate change and biodiversity loss are likely to lead to a reduction in agricultural crop yields.