

# The Advisory Council on Fruit Growing and Vegetable Production placed emphasis on the establishment of producer organizations

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*On 22 March 2017, a Consultative Council on Fruit Growing and Vegetable Production was held at the Ministry of Agriculture and Food. The main topics discussed were the depletion of funds under Measure 10 and Measure 11 and the suspension of the admission of new applicants under these measures, the status of organic producers in the country, the need to preserve old Bulgarian varieties, the stimulating European policy for the establishment of producer organizations, and the provision of plant protection funds for nut crops during the winter period.*

The most topical issue in Bulgarian agriculture at the moment is the depletion of funds under Measure 10 “Agri-environment and climate” and Measure 11 “Organic farming”. The suspension of new beneficiaries under these measures has been provoking a wave of discontent for days, accompanied by threats and protests in front of the agricultural administration. The topic was also leading at the Consultative Council held.

At the meeting held on 22 March between representatives of the branch organizations in fruit growing and vegetable production and the MAF, the pressing problems were discussed and specific proposals were made to deal with the critical situation. The main focus was on organic farming and the shortcomings in its implementation. According to fruit growers, large farms that are in transition to organic status receive money under the measure without intending to become actual producers of organic products. At the same time, farmers with lower yields but marketing certified fruits and vegetables suffer from this. The Union of Dobrudzha Fruit Growers believes that the criteria for genuine organic farms should be reviewed in favor of small and needy producers. They emphasized that they wish to preserve the support under the scheme “Conservation of endangered local varieties” under Measure 10 “Agri-environment and climate”. The support is specific for varieties that are subject to genetic erosion and are not preferred by Bulgarian producers for economic reasons. Their cultivation is usually more expensive and retail chains do not want them, but their taste qualities meet the traditional requirements of the Bulgarian consumer. The measure is relatively new, but the Agricultural Academy reports an increase in interest in Bulgarian seed varieties over the past year.

The Bulgarian Association of Raspberry and Berry Growers (BARBG) also supported the proposal to revise the support schemes in order to avoid the outflow of funds in the field of organic production. The Association also drew attention to the fact that nearly 80% of the funds for organic farming go to activities that are not directly related to the organic production of products. Such is the case with meadows for mowing and pastures. Increasingly, beneficiaries are applying with crops that have a long growing period until first fruiting.

The branch organizations advocated the introduction of additional measures for quality control of organic products and the imposition of sanctions and termination of undertaken commitments, as well as the return of funds received in the event of proven non-fulfilment of the agreed conditions.

The National Association of Producers and Processors of Nuts proposed that the state provide plant protection funds for nut crops during the winter period as well. The sector noted that they are suffering heavy losses due to the sanctions against Russia and expect, after their lifting, to restore their positions on the Russian market.

**The European agricultural policy is to provide funds for producer organizations**

For his part, the Minister of Agriculture and Food, Prof. Dr. Hristo Bozukov, stated during the Consultative Council on Fruit Growing and Vegetable Production that promoting the development of the “Fruit and Vegetables” sector is a priority of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food. An effective instrument in the common organization of the market for agricultural products is the measure for supporting producer organizations. The low level of support for the association of farmers, offered by the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund, amounts to only 4.1% of the value of the offered