

First working days of the new Minister of Agriculture and Forestry

Автор(и): Растителна защита
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At the end of last week, the caretaker Minister of Agriculture and Food, Vasil Grudev, handed over the post to the new Minister of Agriculture, Desislava Taneva, who will also be the first woman to hold this key position.

Immediately after taking office, Desislava Taneva opened on 11/12/2014 the Eighth Working Meeting of the Ministers of Agriculture from Southeastern Europe, held in Sofia. Bulgaria becomes the rotational chairman of the Permanent Working Group for Regional Development of Rural Areas of the countries of Southeastern Europe. In the next year, our country will initiate and lead a

series of high-level meetings with representatives of the EC and international organizations, where current problems in the development of agriculture and rural areas in Southeastern Europe will be discussed.

Vasil Grudev moves to the position of Deputy Minister, sharing this position with Tsvetan Dimitrov and Georgi Kostov. The former Minister of Agriculture and Food takes over the portfolio of European Policies and the Rural Development Programme. Tsvetan Dimitrov retains the portfolio of Plant Health Development, Crop Production and Food Safety, and Georgi Kostov becomes Deputy Minister with the portfolio of Forests and State Enterprises.

At the press conference on 11/14/2014 at the Ministry of Agriculture and Food, Desislava Taneva identified the Bulgarian Food Safety Agency as the main culprit for the catastrophic development of the "bluetongue" disease. As a result, two days ago, the Deputy Executive Director of the agency, Dr. Radoslav Karabadzhiev, who was responsible for the "Animal Health and Welfare and Feed Control" sector, was dismissed from his post.

After announcing the new team of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food, Minister Taneva also elaborated in detail on the priorities of Bulgarian agriculture. ***The main policy to be followed in the coming years is the balanced development of bio-production, livestock farming, and crop production.*** "We will not be generous with promises, but will focus on fulfilling the commitments made," Taneva emphasized. Of course, one of the main challenges for the new team remains the launch of the Rural Development Programme, which is a key investment instrument. As everyone knows, the program was sent in July 2014 and returned by the EC with 426 remarks. Vasil Grudev, who is now directly responsible for this project, stated that he hopes to have unofficial approval by the end of the year, since a large part of the criticisms in the Brussels report have already been removed and the program can be expected to start in early 2015.

At the meeting held on 11/14/2014 between the Ministry of Agriculture and Food and the branch organizations, several main and pressing topics were discussed. The formation of a working group is planned to prepare an update of the land legislation. Deputy Minister Vasil Grudev noted that an organization has been created for launching the new schemes and measures under the direct payments line and for opening some of the investment measures under the RDP.

In the field of livestock farming, priority will be given to active farmers, who will be allocated pastures. According to the Ministry of Agriculture and Food, active work will also be done to maximally ease regulatory regimes and to stimulate producer organizations. The current crisis, resulting from the spread of the "bluetongue" disease, can only be avoided with timely and adequate response to the appearance of infections in animals.

The meeting also discussed the distance between science and practice. Therefore, Deputy Minister Georgi Kostov outlined a new perspective for the Agricultural Academy, namely its main role as a mediator between industry representatives and academic circles. The development and

research of topics coming from practice will stimulate the demand for specialists with agronomic education.

At the end of the week, on 11/15, Minister Taneva attended the official celebration of the 10th anniversary of "Tribul" EAD (a Bulgarian-Greek company that produces dairy products for the Bulgarian market) in Sliven. The company's Executive Director, Dimitrios Sarandis, announced at the ceremony that the company will invest 15 million euros in Bulgaria over the next two years. The dairy products manufacturer with the "Olympus" brand plans to increase production volume by 50% by investing in production facilities and new equipment. From 2004 until now, "Tribul" EAD has invested 20 million euros in Bulgaria.