

MEP Dantin hopes for superlevy after 2015



**THOMAS HUBERT
IN PARIS**

French MEP Michel Dantin, who pushed for a post-quota milk market-control mechanism including a levy on over-production last year, hopes to revive his proposal after a high-level EU conference on the future of the dairy sector on September 24.

Dantin told the *Irish Farmers Journal* that he would attend the meeting, which he expects to turn into "a brainstorming session to come up

with good ideas for the future of the dairy sector, because studies show that the end of quotas will not be an easy ride".

The European Commission, independent experts and farmers' representatives are due to discuss scenarios for the post-2015 era. Dantin claims to have seen the Commission's forecasts.

Although he did not discuss them in detail because they are embargoed until the conference, he summarised them as follows: "It will work well in two and a half countries; in the others, the end of quotas will create difficulties."

'THERE WILL BE ANOTHER CRISIS'

Although he stopped short of predicting a repeat of the 2009 milk price crash,

Dantin said: "I'm convinced there will be another crisis sooner or later. Those who claim that the global trend on world markets means that there will never be crises again are wrong."

Last year, he had included a crisis management provision in the European Parliament's position on CAP reform. Under the proposal, if dairy markets suffered a price crash, farmers who cut their production by 5% compared to the previous year would receive emergency EU payments, while those who increased their output by 5% or more would be charged a new levy.

"A blocking minority emerged around Germany and the Netherlands to reject any new mechanism in the dairy common market organisation at the Council of

Ministers," Dantin said.

The proposal was left out of the final deal on CAP reform agreed between the Council, the Commission and the Parliament at the end of the Irish presidency of the EU last June.

RECITAL ON 'EXCEPTIONAL MEASURES'

However, European leaders added a so-called recital to the chapter on 'exceptional measures' to be applied at times of crisis.

According to that information point, which does not carry the same legal value as an article of law, it is "necessary to emphasise that the adoption by the Commission of the above-mentioned measures in case of market disturbance, including market imbalance, or those needed to solve specific problems in case of emergency may address in particular the milk sector".

Michel Dantin's interpretation of this recital is that "the Commission can suggest new ideas if the situation warrants it". He added: "A window is open."

And he is not alone in thinking that his original aid-and-superlevy package beyond a 5% range in milk output variation could be among such ideas.

Without supporting the measure openly, French agriculture minister Stéphane Le Foll told the *Irish Farmers Journal* in March:

"If everybody increases

output outside any control, discussion, coherence or co-operation, the risk is that the current situation, which is already difficult, turns into a violent milk crisis. I cannot accept that."

France was instrumental in calling the September 24 milk conference.

UNITED FRENCH FRONT

Although Le Foll is in government and Dantin belongs to the opposition, there seems to be a united French front in favour of post-quota market controls.

"We have the same data, the same history, the same economists showing that dairying is not a sector where you can make accurate forecasts of supply or demand - starting with the weather," Dantin said.

He mentioned Spain (also cited by Le Foll) as well as

Finland, Belgium, and even some in Germany among the supporters of his proposal.

The French MEP is aware that many Irish farmers have rejected his idea.

"The idea of a levy flies in the face of all reasonable expectations by the dairy industry that it will be in a position to expand organically post-2015," said ICOS European affairs executive Conor Mulvihill.

Yet, Dantin said there is nothing to fear as the Commission can introduce exceptional measures for only three months.

"If the market goes back to normal, the levy stops," he said. "And the output increase is measured compared to the previous year. If a farmer invests for four years and there is a crash in the fifth, only the increase between years four and five is taken into account. This is simply about dampening down production during a crisis."



**Michel Dantin
MEP**

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