

Wednesday, 16th March 2011 (Source: The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food Press Office)

Simon Coveney, Minister for Agriculture, Food and Marine will attend his first meeting of EU Agriculture Ministers in Brussels tomorrow, St Patrick's Day.

The meeting will consider a number of important issues for Ireland including draft Council conclusions on the communication from the Commission on the future of the CAP after 2013, the trade negotiations with the MERCOSUR group of South American countries, the approval of three GMO applications and the market situation for the dairy sector.

It will also endorse a paper co-sponsored by Ireland that lists six essential principles that should be followed to simplify the workings and operation of the CAP.

Speaking before the meeting Minister Coveney said "I am looking forward to constructive engagement with the EU Commission and my colleagues in the other Member States. I have arranged to meet Agriculture Commissioner Ciolos bilaterally before the Council meeting. I intend to remind him of the importance of agriculture to the Irish economy and to raise with him three of the substantive issues we will discuss at the Council meeting, that is, CAP reform, MERCOSUR and the dairy sector.

I will also be meeting separately with my Ministerial colleagues affiliated to the European Peoples Party where we will discuss CAP reform and the new EU multi-annual financial framework". On CAP reform I will be highlighting the need for a common and well-funded EU agriculture policy that addresses the twin goals of competitiveness and sustainability and the importance of continued direct payments towards achieving those goals.

As to the negotiations with MERCOSUR, I will be urging the Commission to proceed with extreme caution in the upcoming talks and I will ask the Commissioner to take on board our proposals on sustainability and on measures to mitigate the effect of tariff quotas in the beef sector. I will also make the point that no offers should be made by the Commission until a full debate has taken place on these negotiations both at Council and Parliament level".

Minister Coveney said he would use the opportunity presented by the debate on the market situation for the dairy sector to ask the Commission to consider whether a more flexible approach might be adopted for the limited number of Member States likely to have a super levy problem in the run up to 2015. The Minister said "This is an issue that has been raised by a number of Member States and I strongly support a solution that will ensure that a soft landing to the expiry of milk quotas is achieved in ALL member States.

At the same time, I would remind Irish farmers that the current rules do not allow any leeway regarding quota overruns. Farmers here should continue to take all steps to ensure that they do

not exceed their quota this year”.

Minister Coveney will travel onward from Brussels on St Patrick’s Day to Paris where he will meet representatives of major buyers of Irish produce in the French market. He will also take in a visit to the Tourism Ireland trade stand at the MAP World Holiday Fair and the Irish Cultural Centre in Paris.