AGRA FACTS

The latest EU agriculture, environment & trade news

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FOOD PRICES CONTINUE DOWNTREND IN OCTOBER, DESPITE DAIRY REBOUND

World food commodity prices fell by an average 0.5% in Oct 2023 compared with Sept 2023 as their downtrend continues, the UN's Food & Agriculture Organisation (FAO) said earlier today (Nov 3). Last month's levels were 10.9% below those of Oct 2022, according to the Rome-based UN agency. The "slight drop" in its Food Price Index*, "reflects declines in the price indices for sugar, cereals, vegetable oils & meat, while the index for dairy products rebounded," officials stated.

Sugar prices fell by 2.2% from Sept, following two months of hikes, but world prices were still 46.6% above the Oct 2022 levels. Last month's decline was "mainly driven by a strong pace of production in Brazil, despite the negative impact of rains on sugarcane crushing," in the first half of the month, FAO said, also noting the bearish effect of a weaker Brazilian real against the US dollar & lower ethanol prices in the Latin American powerhouse of Brazil. "However, persistent concerns over a tighter global supply outlook in the recently started 2023/24 season, together with shipment delays from Brazil due to logistical constraints, capped the declines of world sugar prices," it pointed out.

A monthly fall of 1.0% in cereals, to 17.9% below the price of a year earlier, was led by wheat, which dropped 1.9% in Oct, "reflecting generally higher-than-earlier-anticipated supplies in the United States of America & strong competition among exporters." Coarse grains were up by 0.6% from Sept. "Thinning maize supplies in Argentina placed upward pressure on world maize prices," FAO officials outlined, but added that higher US supplies, as that country's harvest progressed, capped the rise helped by "strong export competition from Brazil." Rice was down by 2.0% month on month, "weighed by generally passive global import demand," it said.

Oct saw the third consecutive fall, one of 0.7%, for vegetable oil, to 20.7% below the Oct 2022 value. "The marginal fall in the price index chiefly reflected lower world palm oil prices, more than offsetting higher prices of soy, sunflower & rapeseed oils," it said. "International palm oil prices continued to drop in Oct, mainly due to seasonally higher outputs in leading producing countries as well as protracted subdued global import demand." There was a rise in soyoil prices, after two months of falls, "underpinned by robust demand from the biodiesel sector, particularly in the United States of America," it said. "In the meantime, international sunflower oil quotations rose slightly on firm global import purchases, while rapeseed oil also increased moderately on reduced crop prospects in Canada."

Meat was down 0.6% from Sept, its fourth monthly drop in a row, bringing prices to 3.4% below their value in Oct 2022. "International pigmeat prices fell for the third consecutive month, principally driven by the persistently sluggish import demand, especially from some East Asian countries," the UN experts said, also noting "further downward pressure stemming from high exportable availabilities in some leading suppliers." They reported that "world poultry meat prices rebounded slightly, as avian influenza outbreaks continued to constrain supplies from several world leading suppliers amid robust consumer demand due to the relative affordability of poultry meat." Marginal rises in beef & sheepmeat reflected "persistent, robust import demand from some leading importers, notwithstanding ample supplies of bovine meat from Australia & Brazil & ovine meat from Oceania." For the dairy sector, FAO's stats show a 2.2% rise from Sept to Oct, after nine months of consecutive declines, but prices are still down 20.1% from levels in Oct 2022. In Oct 2023, "world milk powder prices increased the most, principally driven by surges in import demand for both near- & longer-term supplies, especially from Northeast Asia," it said. "Tight milk supplies in Western Europe & some uncertainty over the impact of the El Niño weather conditions on the upcoming milk production in Oceania added further upward pressure." Meanwhile, butter prices were higher "due to increased retail sales ahead of the winter holidays in Western Europe & higher import demand from Northeast Asia," UN market analysts also commented. "By contrast, international cheese prices dropped slightly due to the impact of the continued weakening of the Euro against the United States dollar & increased exportable availabilities in Oceania." *https://www.fao.org/worldfoodsituation/foodpricesindex/en/

EUROSTAT HIGHLIGHTS SOARING PRICE OF OLIVE OIL, RISE IN POTATOES

The price of olive oil in Sept 2023 was 75% higher than consumers were paying in Jan 2021, according to Eurostat, which also highlighted a sharp rise in potatoes in the same period, although their cost peaked in June this year. The EU's statistics agency reported this week (Nov 2) that "after substantial increases in 2022, food prices in the EU continued to rise also in 2023," but added that "data for the second & third quarters of this year show that the prices of some items registered a slower increase."

In Sept 2023, EU prices of eggs, butter & potatoes were "higher than in January 2021 & 2022 but are not as high as some months prior, while the prices of olive oil have been consistently increasing," it highlighted. The olive oil price in Sept 2023 was 75% higher than in Jan 2021. "In January 2022, prices were already 11% higher than the same month of the year before, & between September 2022 & September 2023, prices registered a sharp increase," Eurostat explained. "Potato prices were also on a staggering rise," statisticians added. "Since January 2021, prices for potatoes increased by 53% in September 2023, following a peak in June 2023 (+60%)."

Prices of eggs in Sept 2023 were 37% higher than in Jan 2021. "Egg prices stabilized in the first two quarters of 2023 & showed some decrease in August & September this year," Eurostat noted. "Butter prices evolved in a similar manner." "Prices for butter peaked in December 2022 (+44% compared with January 2021) & then slowly started to decline," it explained. "In September, butter was 27% more expensive than in January 2021." The statement from Eurostat came a few days after it published a broader information note showing food, along with alcohol & tobacco have the highest rate of inflation of the sectors in the Eurozone. As the month drew to a close, it put the annual rate of inflation, food, alcohol & tobacco is expected to have the highest annual rate in Oct (7.5%, compared with 8.8% in Sept)," it estimated, "followed by services (4.6%, compared with 4.7% in Sept), non-energy industrial goods (3.5%, compared with 4.1% in Sept) & energy (-11.1%, compared with -4.6% in Sept). *https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/hicp/overview

EP EXPERTS CONSIDER COMMITTEE REFORM POSSIBILITIES, AGRI, ENVI CONFLICTS

The European Parliament is taking a close look at its Committee structure, looking at issues including the way the roles of some Committees, including COMAGRI, conflict with others, such as ENVI. Officials also suggest, in an internal 'Working Document' that AGRI & PECH are so close in subject & membership that they could usefully be merged. In a 9-page 'Reflection paper' on 'Elements to consider in the context of possible revision of Annex VI', the Parliament 2024 Working Group Administrative Support Team, points out that the last substantial revamps were in 1999 & 2004. Some Committees, including COMAGRI, are sectoral, while others such as BUDG, have horizontal consequences. The current competences of sectorial Committees "do not fully correspond to new policies/focus & developments in society," officials point out. "Conflicts of competence have increasingly been solved by making recourse to complicated solutions," they explain & go on to suggest possible regroupings of policy areas for the sectorial Committees. In the agrifood sector, one suggestion is that "agricultural & fisheries could be grouped together as they both contribute to the global food system & food security." They point out that the two are looked at together "in most national parliaments & in the Council," while "the membership of the two Committees largely overlaps." A second possibility is to bring together food safety, agriculture, & fisheries, to "avoid conflicts of competence," particularly between ENVI & AGRI. But the writers warn that "it would maintain/create new conflicts with ENVI because of the link between food production/food safety & environment on one side," giving the impact of pesticides as an example, "& food production/food safety & health on the other."

SCA DELEGATIONS WELCOME GI DEAL, APPROVE OF LONG-TERM VISION DIRECTION

Member States largely welcomed the compromise text on geographical indications at Monday's (Oct 30) meeting of the Special Committee on Agriculture (SCA) in Brussels's Europa Building. They also reacted positively the direction plans on the long-term vision for rural areas are taking.

Kicking off on Monday morning, delegates heard details from the Spanish Presidency of the Oct 24 provisional deal on the regulation on geographical indications & quality schemes *[see AF95-23]*. The spokeswoman told the Committee that more technical work is needed before a consolidated text is put to the SCA for approval, something expected to happen in Nov. Once the SCA has given its endorsement to the political agreement, the text will be finalised by legal & linguistic exports, a process expected to take around 12 weeks, before its final adoption. Most delegations responded, with general support for the accord, which was widely seen as a balanced compromise.

Delegates also discussed a revised version, from the Presidency, of the Conclusions on a Long-Term Vision for the EU's Rural Areas (LTVRA). Spain explained that comments from the Committee had been included in the text. The Presidency's goal is for the Council Conclusions to be adopted at the next AGRIFISH Council in Brussels on Nov 20.

Representing the Commission, Mario Milouchev, Director of DG AGRI.D CAP Strategic Plans II, relayed the EU executive's pleasure that the Spanish Presidency had included the results of the Sigüenza high-level rural policy forum in its new draft, also welcoming references to the rural pact, & to the geopolitical dimension. Member State representatives welcomed the changes made to the draft, & the direction in which the text has been taken. There were suggestions that it could be further streamlined, with more emphasis on forestry, on the importance of the CAP, as well as funds from non-CAP sources. Delegates also highlighted generational renewal, rural depopulation, reference to future enlargements, & rural cooperatives, as areas of interest that should be included. The Presidency took note & plans to prepare an updated draft with the goal of presenting it to the Committee on Nov 14 (falling on a Tuesday, & not on Monday, Nov 13 due to "technical issues"). The Presidency also presented the draft agenda for the next AGRIFISH Council on Nov 20, which will be for one day only. It has included the intention to approve conclusions on LTVRA, while the likely topic for the Ministerial lunch is the first year of application of CAP Strategic Plans. The three AOB items currently foreseen are information from the Presidency on the state of play on new genomic techniques & non-wood forest products &, from the Commission, the implementation of the EU Forest Strategy for 2030. At its next meeting on Nov 14, the Presidency will present the SCA with an updated version of the LTVRA Conclusions. A discussion on CAP Strategic Plans, feeding into the stock-taking exercise discussion is also planned. The Presidency also intends to present a compromise proposal on the breakfast directives.

DATES FOR DIARY: EDA Convention; Good Food Good Farming protest; Precision breeding;

EDA 2023 Convention (Nov 9): The European Dairy Association (EDA) Convention 'The Future is Dairy' will take place in Brussels next week (Nov 7-9). Kicking off at 7pm on Tuesday evening, there will be a welcome reception 'Dairy on the top' at The Hotel on Boulevard de Waterloo, with a welcome speech by Belgian Deputy Prime Minister David Clarinval. The following day (Nov 8) will be taken up with internal meetings with the EDA membership. The General Assembly is slated for bright & early the following morning (from 8.30am-9.30am). After a short break to allow for refreshments (from 10.30am), Presidents Giuseppe Ambrosi (EDA) & Catherine Pycke (BCZ-CBL) will deliver the opening remarks of the 'CEO session' on 'Europe - the Dairy Superpower'. From 10.45am, there will be a 'fireside chat' setting the scene on 'What does the future hold for European dairy?,' with Peder Tuborgh, Arla Food's CEO, Elli Siltala, Valio Executive Vice-President & Thierry Clément, COO at Lactalis Group. From 11.30am, the second panel debate will deal with 'Delivering sustainable growth in dairy,' with interventions from Jan Derck van Karnebeek, CEO FrieslandCampina, Charles Brand, EVP for Processing Solutions & Equipment at Tetra Pak & Louis Ska, CEO of Solarec (BE). For the final 15 minutes, there will be a question & answer session with all six speakers on stage. The 'first' session, moderated by AGRA FACTS' Rose O'Donovan, will draw to a close just before lunchtime. The second one 'Shaping the future of EU agriculture/dairy 2024-2029' (from 2pm-3pm) comprises a host of key MEPs such as COMAGRI Chairman Norbert Lins (EPP, DE).

Good Food Good Farming take to the streets: The **Good Food Good Farming Alliance** is planning a "protest action' in front of the European Parliament next Wednesday (Nov 8). Kicking off at 4.30pm, some 400 participants are expected to gather at Place du Luxembourg, in a bid to push the EU's political leaders to put food systems back on the table, as commitments made under the Farm to Fork Strategy are not being upheld by the current administration. The aim of the protest is to highlight the need for resilient & socially just food systems, with participants handing over demands from citizens to a number of MEPs. Following the 'handover', there will be speeches from the likes of Christine Mahy (Walloon Network Against Poverty), Chloé Mikolajczak (environmental justice activist), & Mathieu Courgeau (dairy farmer, Confédération Paysanne). A protest march is planned through Rue Marie de Bourgogne, Rue Belliard & Rue d'Arlon led by a samba band & demonstrators carrying a banner with the message *'We cannot eat promises.'* This will be followed by a 'Disco Soup' organised by Slow Food & a stage performance 'the real price of food' from ARSENIC.

UK Mission hosts event on 'Precision Breeding': The UK Mission to the EU is hosting an event on 'New Genomic Techniques: A Deep Dive' at the British Residence in Brussels (Rue Ducale) next Thursday afternoon (Nov 9). The aim of the event is to consider the science & safety of Precision Breeding as well as generate debate on the next steps of the UK's Precision Breeding Act, and development of the food & feed authorisation process by the Food Standards Agency - shortly to be announced through a public consultation. The consultation, due to be made public in the coming weeks, will detail UK government policy proposals for the approval process for developers to market Precision Bred Organisms (PBO) for use in food or feed, & the operation of a public register for PBOs. Kicking off at 2pm (registration from 1.30pm), UKMIS EU Counsellor Zoe Compston will formally launch proceedings. Speakers include Dr Louise Ball, Policy Lead for Precision Breeding & Genetic Modification at the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA), James Cooper, Deputy Director for Food Policy at the Food Standards Agency & Professor Jim Dunwell of the UK Government Advisory Committee on Environmental Releases. In addition, Professors Andrzej Nowak & Marcin Napiórkowski of Reimagine Europe will present their views on narratives formed within the New Genomic Techniques debate at the broader EU level. The discussion takes place under the Chatham House Rule, while refreshments will be served just before 5pm. Those interested in attending can RSVP to UKMISBrussels.Events@fcdo.gov.uk by Tuesday (Nov 7) at the latest.

IN BRIEF: CZ, FI, IT, & FR aids; FR oyster, olive oil, RO pork GIs; egg sexing technology

CZ biomethane aid approved: The Commission said on Oct 31 that it had approved a €2.4 billion Czech scheme to support the construction & operation of new or converted sustainable biomethane production plants. The biomethane produced will either go into the natural gas grid or be delivered to a filling station or dispensing unit, for use in applications such as transport or heating.

The scheme will run until Dec 31, 2025. The aid will be in the form of a green bonus paid to biomethane producers for each MWh of biomethane produced over 20 years. The amount of the subsidy will be set annually by the Energy Regulatory Office. The beneficiaries are expected to be mainly small & medium-sized enterprises or renewable energy communities with projects of up to 6 MW capacity. The scheme is expected to support installations with a total biomethane output of around 337 million standard cubic meters. EU Competition Commissioner Didier Reynders, said the initiative would "help Czechia meet its emission reduction targets, & end the dependence on Russian fossil fuel, whilst improving security of gas supply." It also "ensures that possible distortions of competition are limited," he added. **For more information, once any confidentiality issues have been resolved, go to the state aid register* & search under case number **SA.104686**:

OK for Finnish methane subsidy: The Commission has announced approval for a €66 million Finnish scheme to subsidise the production of renewable methane & methanol. It said on Oct 30 that the scheme would be in the form of direct grants covering investment costs, aiming to "foster the transition to a net-zero economy." Payments will be granted on the basis of plans with an estimated capacity volume & budget, at a level which will not be more than 45% of the project's total investment costs. Aid will be granted before Dec 31, 2025. *For more information, once any confidentiality issues have been resolved, go to the state aid register & search under case number SA.105338;

Italian war aid for employers: A \in 61.5 million Italian scheme, designed to support private employers against the background of the war in Ukraine, has received Commission approval, officials confirmed on Oct 31. The aid will be paid in the form of direct grants. The scheme supports private employers by exempting them from paying social security contributions for hiring disadvantaged workers, up to a maximum of \in 8 000 per hiring contract. To be eligible, the beneficiaries must hire workers during the period Jan 1, 2023 to Dec 31, 2023. The aid will not exceed \in 250 000 per company in the agricultural sector, \in 300 000 per company in the fishery & aquaculture sectors, & \in 2 million per company in all other sectors & will be granted no later than Dec 31, 2023. *For more information, once any confidentiality issues have been resolved, go to the state aid register & search under case number SA.108654;

Italian farm sector aid: On Nov 3, the Commission approved a €450 million Italian scheme designed to encourage investments related to primary agricultural production, & to the processing & marketing of agricultural products. The financial assistance will be in the form of subsidised loans covering up to 80% of the eligible costs & the scheme will run until Dec 31, 2025. It will be open to companies active in primary agricultural products in Italy.

*For more information, once any confidentiality issues have been resolved, go to the state aid register & search under case number SA.107521;

French wine sector aid: A French scheme, worth €30 million, to compensate vineyard businesses in the Bordeaux area for the permanent uprooting of vines for plant health reasons, has received Commission approval, officials confirmed earlier today (Nov 3). The financial assistance will be in the form of direct grants to small & medium-sized enterprises in Gironde engaged in viticulture. It will run until Dec 31, 2025. The objective is to compensate producers approaching retirement or changing career who voluntarily & permanently reduce the production capacity of their land. The scheme aims to reduce the density of the vineyards in the area to combat the spread of leafhopper disease, which has a significant impact on yields. Producers will get €6 000 per hectare of vineyards for the permanent elimination of production capacity on affected plots.

French oyster PGI agreed: The Commission approved the addition of the French Oyster 'Huître de Normandie', to the register of protected geographical indications (PGI) on Oct 31. Huître de Normandie oysters come from the coastal municipalities of the departments of Manche, Calvados, Eure & Seine-Maritime, from the municipality of Granville in the west to the municipality of Sainte-Marguerite-sur-Mer in the east. The oysters derive their specific characteristics from the natural environment of the Normandy coastline & the know-how of the oyster farmers in the area. The conditions are ideal for oyster farming with a broad & open foreshore, large tidal ranges, strong currents & good water quality. The oysters have a shell with a regular shape & no chipped or crumbly parts. The muscle is firm & tightly seals the shell, ensuring good preservation. *https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52023XC0706(01)

French olive oil awarded PDO marker: Also on Oct 31, the Commission approved the registration of the olive oil, 'Huile d'olive du Languedoc' as a protected designation of origin (PDO). Coming from the departments of Aude & Hérault, on the Mediterranean coast of France, Languedoc Olive Oil is a multi-variety olive oil, primarily composed of Lucques or Olivière olives. The proportion of those two varieties is less than or equal to 70% of the oil, which has taste & smell with notes of tomato & almond, possibly complemented by hints of apple.*https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52023XC0628(03)

Romanian smoked pork PGI: The Romanian smoked pork product 'Salinate de Turda' has been approved as a protected geographical indication (PGI), the Commission said on Nov 3. It uses pork from the neck, loin, belly or leg, brined in natural spring brine, combined with seasoning mix, sugars & lactic starter cultures, then matured for 5-7 days, hardwood-smoked (beech-smoked) & matured/dry-cured for 20-28 days. Salinate de Turda comes from the municipality of Turda & the communes of Mihai Viteazu, Tureni & Ploscoș in the county of Cluj in the south of the country.

*https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52023XC0712(02)

Finance for egg sexing technology: The European Investment Bank (EIB) has signed a €40 million loan agreement with In Ovo, covering 2023-2026, to scale up the Dutch AgriTech company's 'Ella' technology, which can identify the sex of eggs at an early stage. The Leiden University spin-off's screening machine can allow hatcheries to only hatch laying hens, thus eliminating the need to cull male chicks. An estimated 6.5 billion male chicks are killed each year in the production of laying hens.

In Ovo's founder Wouter Bruins said that the EIB finance "will permit us to further develop our technology pipeline & become a worldwide player, making (an) impact on animals throughout the food production channel." EU Health & Food Safety Commissioner Stella Kyriakides commented that "ensuring that Europe's animal welfare standards are amongst the highest in the world is a priority for us." "With this technology, we will be avoiding the systematic killing of millions of male chicks throughout the European Union," the Cypriot politician added. "This is a major step in our work to strengthen animal welfare standards in our Union."

TIMETABLE: Week ahead (in Brussels unless otherwise stated);

- Nov 6 President Ursula von der Leyen delivers a speech at the EU Ambassadors' Conference 2023 EU Ambassadors' Conference | EEAS (europa.eu); Executive Vice-President Maroš Šefčovič receives representatives of the European Council of Young Farmers (CEJA), IFOAM Organics Europe, FoodDrinkEurope & COPA-COGECA in preparation for the 'Strategic Dialogue;' Agriculture Commissioner Janusz Wojciechowski speaks via videoconference at online debate on the future CAP, climate-environmental challenges, food security, & Ukraine, organised by Dr Jan Szomburg; Health Commissioner Stella Kyriakides in Sofia (& Nov 7) meets with representatives of cancer patient associations; Commissioner for Climate Action Wopke Hoekstra in Kenya (& Nov 7) - continues preparations for the COP28 UN Climate Change Conference, meets with William Ruto, President, Soipan Tuya, Minister for Environment, Climate Change & Forestry, Njuguna Ndung'u, Minister for Finance & Cabinet Secretary at the National Treasury & Economic Planning & key representatives of civil society & the policy community;
- Nov 7 Von der Leyen receives His Majesty King Abdullah II Ibn Al Hussein, King of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, receives the 'Global Board Ready Women' Task Force; Šefčovič receives representatives of the European Consumer Organisation (BEUC), European Coordination Via Campesina & Green 10, as well as Pascal Lamy, Vice-President of the Paris Peace Forum & coordinator of the Jacques Delors Institutes; Wojciechowski speaks via VC at the 17th Annual Meeting of the Ministers of Agriculture from South Eastern Europe; Kyriakides in Sofia, meets with Bulgarian Ministers Dr Hristo Hinkov (Health) & Kiril Vatev (Agriculture & Food); Environment Commissioner Virginijus Sinkevičius speaks about the Deforestation Regulation at the 2023 Ambassadors Conference; Hoekstra in Kenya, visits an EU-funded project supporting regional capacity to monitor, analyse & communicate weather patterns in the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) region in Eastern Africa & delivers a speech at the University of Nairobi;
- Nov 8 College meeting *inc.* Enlargement Package; Von der Leyen participates in the EP plenary debate on the conclusions of the European Council (Oct 26-27), receives Mark Rutte, Dutch Prime Minister; Wojciechowski in Slovenia visits regions & communities affected by recent floods; Sinkevičius receives organisers of ECI Save Cruelty-Free Cosmetics & Irish Farmers' Association (IFA); EP mini plenary session in Brussels (Nov 9);
- Nov 9 Von der Leyen in Berlin, delivers a speech on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KfW) Development Bank; In Stuttgart, meets with the European Round Table of Industrialists; Sefčovič receives Sandrine Dixson-Declève, Co-President of the Club of Rome, Ibrahim Baylan, former Minister of Sweden, & participates in the panel 'The urgent challenges of climate change & the green transition' at the EU Ambassadors' Conference;
- Nov 10 Wojciechowski speaks via VC at the 12th edition of the Aspen German Marshall Fund Bucharest Forum, organised by the Aspen Institute Romania & the German Marshall Fund of the US; Sinkevičius in Chemnitz, Germany - participates at the *Carlowitz Sustainability Prize;*
- **Nov 11** Sinkevičius in Paris, participates on the panel 'No Nature, No Future: Tackling the biodiversity emergency' at the Paris Peace Forum;

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