

USDA Foreign Agricultural Service

GAIN Report

Global Agricultural Information Network

THIS REPORT CONTAINS ASSESSMENTS OF COMMODITY AND TRADE ISSUES MADE BY
USDA STAFF AND NOT NECESSARILY STATEMENTS OF OFFICIAL U.S. GOVERNMENT
POLICY

Voluntary Public

Date: 1/9/2015

GAIN Report Number: E15001

EU-28

Post: Brussels USEU

European Commission 2015 Work Program

Report Categories:

Agriculture in the News

Trade Policy Monitoring

Approved By:

Cynthia Guven

Prepared By:

Hilde Brans

Report Highlights:

On December 16, 2014, the European Commission presented its work program for 2015. European Commission President Juncker claims that he is taking a radically different approach by presenting a work program that only includes 23 new initiatives compared to the average 130 initiatives in the past five years. Following an analysis of 452 proposals, the European Commission came up with a "kill list" in which it proposes withdrawing or amending 80 proposals including the proposed revision of the organic framework legislation.

The European Commission 2015 Work Program

On December 16, 2014, the European Commission presented its work program for 2015. The annual work program is usually published in October but as 2014 was an election year with a new Commission taking office on November 1, the annual work program was only published in December. Commission President Juncker who owes his nomination to the European Parliament (EP) is taking every opportunity to stress that this work program translates his “Political Guidelines” into concrete actions. On July 15, 2014, the EP approved Juncker’s nomination on the basis of his political strategy for the next five years outlined in “My agenda for Jobs, Growth, Fairness and Democratic Change”. Juncker promised to be “more political” than his predecessor and stated his intention to review the EU’s GMO authorization process. The [Commission 2015 Work Program](#) consists of a political Communication and four annexes: [Annex I](#) lists new initiatives; [Annex II](#) sets out a “kill list”; [Annex III](#) proposes fitness checks and evaluations of existing legislation; [Annex IV](#) lists legislation that will become applicable in 2015.

New Initiatives

Juncker claims that he is taking a radically different approach by presenting a work program that only includes 23 new initiatives compared to the average 130 initiatives in the past five years. Only legislative proposals which will very likely be adopted by the EU legislators (EP and Council) are included in the work program. The only legislative initiative relating to agriculture is, as Juncker promised to the EP, the review of the EU’s GMO decision-making process. According to the description provided, the “review will look at how the rules could be changed to better ensure the majority view of Member States is taken into account”. For each of the 23 new proposals, the Commission will publish “roadmaps” on the Impact Assessment website with further details on policy options and timing.

The list of new initiatives (Annex I) can be downloaded from the European Commission’s website at http://ec.europa.eu/atwork/pdf/cwp_2015_new_initiatives_en.pdf.

Political Discontinuity

The new European Commission took office on November 1, 2014. At the start of a new Commission’s term of office, the “principle of political discontinuity” applies. This means that the new Commission reviews pending legislative proposals initiated by the previous Commission in order to politically confirm or withdraw them. Following an analysis of 452 proposals, the Commission came up with a “kill list” (Annex II) in which it proposes withdrawing or amending 80 proposals.

“Kill List”

Most of the proposed withdrawals listed in Annex II are for technical reasons or because the initiatives became obsolete but some have a political ground. A number of legislative proposals would be withdrawn because the Commission believes that Member States will not find agreement amongst themselves or with the EP. One change affecting agriculture applies to the organic proposal. Although negotiations between the EP and Council on the revision of the EU’s organic food rules proposed in

March 2013 have already started, the Commission has included the proposed revision in the “kill list”. Unless the EP and Council come to an agreement within 6 months, the Commission will withdraw the proposal and table a new legislative initiative. Also included is the controversial proposal on plant reproductive material (the “seeds proposal”) tabled in May 2013. In March 2014, the EP in first reading (ordinary legislative procedure) voted to reject the seeds proposal and in September 2014 the EP President sent a letter asking the Commission to withdraw the proposal.

The complete list of proposed withdrawals and modifications of pending proposals (Annex II) can be downloaded from the Commission’s website at http://ec.europa.eu/atwork/pdf/cwp_2015_withdrawals_en.pdf.

Commission Right to Withdraw Proposals

The Commission also indicated that it would be more aggressive about withdrawing proposals when the original text of a proposal has substantially changed during the legislative process. However, in 2013, the Council of EU Ministers challenged a decision taken by the previous Commission to withdraw a proposal on financial assistance to non-EU countries arguing that the Commission does not have the right to do so. On December 18, 2014, an advocate general of the European Court of Justice (ECJ) issued an opinion saying that the Commission does have the right to withdraw proposals in the first reading phase of the ordinary legislative procedure (co-decision). Once a proposal has passed first reading, the Commission would no longer be able to withdraw proposals. Although ECJ’s judges are not obliged to follow an advocate general’s opinion, they usually do so. The ECJ’s ruling is expected early 2015.