

EU governments respond to mass farmer protests

By [Tom Joyce](#) | 2 February 2024

Farmers blocked roads across Europe this week, as demands for action on falling prices and rising costs heightened, pressing governments to offer concessions

Europe has been rocked this week by a wave of protests and road blockages, in France, Belgium, Germany, Poland, Portugal and Greece, as farmers protest issues from falling sales prices and increasing costs to heavy regulation and perceived unfair competition from outside the EU.

Gert Ickx at the Port of Antwerp-Bruges said that farmers had blocked the roads into and out of the Belgian port in Zeebrugge. “No trucks have been allowed into the port since the start of the action,” he said yesterday, “although a number of trucks with perishables was allowed to leave the port.”

An update from the port this morning included advice to “be prepared for inconvenience and delays. Avoid Zeebrugge if possible”.



A blocked road near Toulouse (Photo: Raymond Trencavel)

Profit squeeze

Costs of energy, fertiliser and the decision to waive quotas have depressed prices for

Welcome to Fruitnet.com. This site uses cookies. [Read our policy.](#)

While the EU's invasion has

As Fruitnet reported last autumn, astonishingly, less than half of the fresh produce sold globally makes any profit, according to a report by the Global Coalition of Fresh Produce (GCFP).

In France, farmers have complained about the differing regulations between EU produce and imports from the likes of Chile and New Zealand, while some fear the impact of a trade deal between the EU and the Mercosur trading bloc in South America.

Fuelling the fire?

On fuel, EU governments have taken action to quell some of the resentment. Greece announced plans to extend a special tax rebate on agricultural diesel by a year, France ditched a diesel tax increase and Germany diluted plans to cut diesel subsidies.

Environmental groups fear that looming European elections and the rise of the far right in some EU countries mean efforts to weaken environmental rules are meeting less resistance.

Meanwhile, increasingly frequent extreme weather events, such as the drought in Spain, recent floods in France and Greece, as well as unprecedented wildfires, are a stark reminder of the need for immediate action on the climate crisis.

“Everywhere in Europe the same question arises: how do we continue to produce more but better?” asked French prime minister Gabriel Attal. “How can we continue to tackle climate change? How can we avoid unfair competition from foreign countries?”

French proposal

Attal proposed the creation of a “European control force” to combat fraud, promising to fight against imports of produce that don’t follow European and French health standards. He also said no pesticides would be banned in France that are authorised elsewhere in the EU.

French agriculture Minister Marc Fesneau announced a €2bn package to fund loans for those setting up as farmers. And the government said it would fine industrial groups and supermarkets that did not comply with a 2018 law meant to guarantee a fair price for farmers.

In response, France’s leading farming unions have called for an end to nationwide roadblocks.

”Critical phase” for Spain

Speaking ahead of yesterday’s EU crisis summit in Brussels, Spain’s Citrus Management Committee (CGC) said it was “irreparable damage” that could be “threatened to cause

Welcome to Fruitnet.com. This site uses cookies.

[Read our policy.](#)

“The only short-term : t of Spanish perishable products to their destinations,” the committee said. “This is not the time for more

EUROFRUIT time to go beyond words and be firm, to be forceful both to resolve this long episode of chaos and to demand compensation for the million-dollar losses that have already been provoked.”

The CGC pointed out that French legislation only recognises the right to compensation in case of destruction of the merchandise and not for losses caused by delays, which affect the condition of the fruit, or cancellation of orders and loss of commercial opportunities.

CGC president Inmaculada Sanfeliu commented: “Each day of foreign trade that is lost in the campaign is a day that you can’t get back

EUROFRUIT



Welcome to Fruitnet.com. This site uses cookies.
[Read our policy.](#)