

EU regulation Is the playing field truly level?

The CGA looks to European policy makers to try and predict the future regulatory environment that will directly affect its members. By **Paula Bester** and **Paul Hardman**

This article highlights some of the current EU policy topics that have the CGA's rapt attention. The regulations relating to maximum residue levels (MRLs) that are critical from a trade and food safety point of view, are a case in point.

In a statement published by the EU Parliament in September 2024, they requested the EU Commission to halt the adoption of MRLs (import tolerances) for active substances that are no longer available to EU farmers, to ensure a level playing field. This is, even if the independent European Food Safety Authority proposed MRLs for these active substances that are considered safe.

Then in September 2025, the European Parliament adopted its position on the future of the EU agricultural policy and called on the Commission to adopt safeguard clauses to ensure that imported agricultural products are held to the same food safety, environment, social, and animal welfare standards as those produced in Europe.

In this resolution, the future vision of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) was also detailed. The CAP is described as a policy that plays a critical role in the current uncertain geopolitical context and is key to Europe's resilient food production – that is, the quantity, quality, and affordability of food for consumers. The 2021–2027 CAP has a budget of almost €387 billion (R7.8 trillion) to enhance European farmer competitiveness. Parliament has asked for this budget to be increased with guaranteed direct income support for all active, professional EU farmers.



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Third country suppliers to the EU must comply with legislative changes, even without access to requisite support mechanisms.

While EU farmers receive significant financial support, the EU Parliament is also seeking to impose requirements for third country suppliers. However, they won't necessarily be financially compensated.

Furthermore, Parliament requested that any legislative changes that may affect EU farmers should be introduced in a way that enforces stability and predictability in the agricultural sector, with farm-level impact assessments being a prerequisite. Unnecessary regulatory and administrative burdens on growers should be avoided, reasonable transitional periods should be allowed, and legislative changes should be accompanied by adequate adaptation budgets through the CAP.

To put this into a real-life context, the Parliament acknowledged that the withdrawal of plant protection products without suitable alternatives exposes EU farmers to pests and diseases, reduces their profitability and competitiveness, increases food waste, and threatens food security.

The expectation is that EU farmers should be supported through these transitional processes. However, third country suppliers must comply, even though they don't always have access to the same financial support mechanisms. This makes for a playing field that is hardly level. 



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