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Brussels, 27. 03. 2017
(2017) 162707c

Dear Ms Schreijer-Pierik, Dear Mr Böge,

Thank you for your letter of 16 February explaining the impact of the current avian influenza epidemic on "free range" egg producers and requesting an urgent extension of the 12 week derogation (laid down in Commission Regulation (EU) No 589/2008).

As stated in my letter addressed to the Chairman of the COM AGRI on 7 February, I looked at the possibilities to extend urgently the 12 week derogation, during which eggs from birds subject to a confinement order can still continue to be marketed as "free range". Having considered the issues involved and the interests of all stakeholders – from the producer to the consumer - I have decided to not table a proposal in the context of the current epidemic, as this would have undermined the reputation of EU marketing standards by putting into question the credibility of the very product and indeed potentially damaging the "free range" brand.

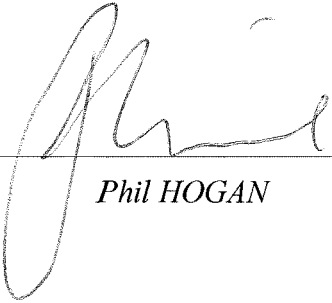
I acknowledge that concerned actors are faced with the cost of relabeling, repackaging and reduced prices for their products, but this has to be balanced with the long term credibility of the "free range" brand for consumers.

As regards a possible support for egg producers, Regulation (EU) No 1308/2013 establishing a Common Organisation of the Markets in Agricultural Products (CMO) contains a chapter dedicated to exceptional measures detailed in Articles 219 to 222. With regard to Article 221 CMO that you bring to my attention, I would like to underline the framework in which it has been conceived by the legislator: measures under that Article can only be adopted if it is not possible to adopt the required measures in accordance with Article 219 and 220 CMO. As you know, measures concerning animal diseases are dealt with under Article 220 CMO. It is therefore under the latter that possible measures might be contemplated. Such measures require, among others, an explicit request by the Member State concerned and are to be co-financed at a 50% rate.

*Members of the European Parliament
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Finally, I would like to confirm that I will undertake a review of marketing standards, with a view to a possible modification of the current rule on "free range" eggs in light of possible future prolonged epidemics such as the one that we are experiencing now.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Phil Hogan', written over a horizontal line.

Phil HOGAN