

Guidelines on ensuring producer sustainability agreements are not anti-competitive

Published by AGRINFO on 31 Jan 2024

Commission guidelines on sustainability agreements of agricultural producers [[Communication - C\(2023\)8306](#) – direct download]

What is changing and why?

The EU generally does not allow producers to conclude agreements between each other, as this may prevent competition on the market. However, since January 2021, producers have been allowed to reach agreements that aim specifically to achieve higher sustainability standards. This derogation (exception) allows farmers to work together to achieve the EU's sustainability goals, without being at risk of breaching EU competition law.

The Commission has developed guidelines to help producers make agreements that correctly apply the derogation from competition law. This rule and guidelines also apply to sustainability agreements between non-EU suppliers and EU buyers.

The guidelines must be strictly applied. For example, sustainability agreements must aim for higher sustainability standards than required by the EU or the relevant EU Member State, and must be indispensable for achieving these goals.

Actions

Any sustainability agreements involving non-EU producers concluded between 8 December 2021 and 8 December 2023 must be urgently reviewed to ensure that they are in line with the new Commission guidelines. If an agreement or practice does not comply, producers and operators may be prosecuted and fined for infringement of EU competition law.

Producers or associations in non-EU countries should explore the potential of sustainability agreements to maximise their efforts to introduce higher sustainability standards. The guidelines offer several examples, including reducing the use of pesticides.

Timeline

Date of publication: 8 December 2023.

For more information see the [full record](#) on the AGRINFO website – where you can also view the latest [AGRINFO Update](#) newsletters and [search](#) the database.

Disclaimer: *Under no circumstances shall COLEAD be liable for any loss, damage, liability or expense incurred or suffered that is claimed to have resulted from the use of information available on this website or any link to external sites. The use of the website is at the user's sole risk and responsibility. This information platform was created and maintained with the financial support of the European Union. Its contents do not, however, reflect the views of the European Union.*