



Farming-only legislation 'not a good idea,' Bundeskartellamt official says

20 Oct 17 | 15:56 GMT

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IN BRIEF

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Felix Engelsing, who leads the unit dealing with agriculture at the Bundeskartellamt, said many sectors suffer from similar problems and that a "general approach" would be preferable.

"I don't think it would be very good idea to have special rules only for the food industry and special treatment for farmers," he said.

His words at a conference* in Brussels yesterday come as new legislation aimed at making the food chain "fairer" for farmers is under consideration by the European Commission.

The commission's agriculture chief, Phil Hogan, announced a public consultation in August, saying at the time that the EU regulator was acting to "address the shortcomings" in the food supply chain, which leaves farmers as "the weakest link."

The proposal — expected to be ready next spring — would establish a common legal framework across the bloc for stopping "unfair commercial practices" in the farming sector. This is behavior that stops short of an antitrust breach but could see a retailer worsening contract terms with a farmer if it doesn't get its way.

— Antitrust exemptions —

Earlier this week farmers scored a separate victory when EU government officials confirmed they had given the thumbs-up to a plan that would see existing antitrust exemptions for olive oil, beef and arable crops extended to the entire agriculture sector.

It means that producer organizations representing all agricultural industries will be able to

work together without falling foul of competition law.

But Engelhing said that other industries have also suffered from some of the same problems as agriculture. "We have also many complaints regarding the book sector or cosmetics sector ... I think a general approach is a better one," he said.

** CMS EU Competition Conference, Brussels, Oct 19, 2017.*

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