

Morning Agri and Food: Unpacking SAIO — Banana lobbying — Pigmear crisis

by [Gabriela Galindo](#) · 4 HOURS AGO · 8 MINUTES READ

Press play to listen to this article

0:00 / 9:16

Voiced by Amazon Polly

MORNING AGRICULTURE & FOOD

By **GABRIELA GALINDO**

with **Zosia Wanat**

SNEAK PEEK

— **It's trilogue season again:** EU Parliament and Council will this week kick start talks on the agri-data SAIO file — we have the lowdown on what it is and why it's so crucial for the Farm to Fork goals.

— **SCOOP:** Representatives of fruit exporting giants **Del Monte, Chiquita and Dole** are lobbying EU officials to keep the EU's recent ban on the fungicide **mancozeb** from impacting their banana exporting business.

— **Pigmear crisis warnings:** Agriculture MEPs are calling on the Commission to help the EU's pigmeat sector deal with major product surpluses, saying failure to act will harm the environment.

Good morning Morning Agri readers and welcome to a busy week in the EU's agri and food bubble: From data trilogues to a Chinese move on plant-based food, we have the lowdown on what to look out for this week. We are always happy to chat and can be reached at: ewax@politico.eu, ggalindo@politico.eu or zwanat@politico.eu. | Find us on Twitter [@eddywax](#), [@gabgr](#) and [@zosiawanat](#).

DRIVING THE DAY

MEPs AND COUNTRIES GEAR UP FOR AGRI DATA TRILOGUES: The European Union has a major pesticide blind spot, as the current data collection system means it is unable to draw up harmonized statistics on pesticide usage — such as which and how much of a specific active substance was used, as well as exactly where and when. Starting this week, the first agri trilogues of the year will see EU Parliament and Council negotiators take a stab at finding a fix.

Data shambles: While Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) rules oblige EU farmers to keep strict pesticide-use records, EU-wide statistics on pesticides are currently drawn up via separate, voluntary surveys, which are not bound by common reporting and collecting rules — meaning that one EU country's report is often quite different from another's.

SAIO trilogues: Contrary to what its name might suggest, the Statistics on Agricultural Input and Output (SAIO) will be a high-stakes file for Brussels, as it will largely determine how well-equipped the EU will be in tracking progress for the Farm to Fork (F2F) goals of halving pesticide use and risk by 2030. But, judging from each side's position, an agreement is not quite within reach.

Parliament's take: The EU Parliament [wants](#) to use the existing statistics (which the CAP demands farmers keep) as a launchpad. They think that these records are already detailed enough and provide a good basis for developing relevant usage statistics on a yearly basis.

Council's take: The EU Council's [mandate](#), voted on in December, says that the data should be collected every five years and that the regulation should enter into force in 2026 — only four years before the EU is meant to hit the F2F pesticide reduction target.

France's time to shine? The fact that France is at the helm of the Council makes the upcoming SAIO trilogues all the more political in nature: French Agriculture Minister Julien Denormandie has picked up President Emmanuel Macron's demand for the EU to act on pesticides, so making sure the outcome is beefy enough to achieve that can only play into Paris' hands.

But officials close to the discussions have said that, at least for the time being, they have not seen much of Denormandie.

German wild card? Following the arrival of a new Green agriculture minister, Berlin was one of only two capitals who voted down the Council mandate. "Transmission of data on [pesticide use] only every 5 years is not acceptable," the farm ministry [tweeted](#) at the time.

SCOOP — BIG BANANA TRADERS SCRAMBLING AFTER EU FUNGICIDE BAN:

Big U.S.-based banana companies are trying to make sure that a recent EU ban on a fungicide called mancozeb won't end their reign as top suppliers of the EU's favorite fruit, documents obtained by Morning Agri show.

Background: A mancozeb ban came into force at the start of the year, after EU countries [voted](#) not to renew its permit over health concerns. Banana farms in Latin America use it to fight off a pest called Black Sigatoka. EU food safety watchdog EFSA is now assessing data to inform a Commission decision on whether to lower the Maximum Residue Limits (MRLs) allowed on imported fruit from third countries.

Banana alliance: EU lobby Alber & Geiger (A&G) is making the rounds among EU officials, including at EFSA, in an attempt to keep [current](#) mancozeb MRLs for bananas unchanged, a letter addressed to an MEP shows. In the letter, the lobby says it is acting on behalf of the Global Banana Sustainability Alliance (GBSA), which groups U.S. fruit-exporting giants Chiquita, Dole and Del Monte as well as Fyffes, owned by Japan's Sumitomo Group.

According to the [EU Transparency register](#), A&G's work for the alliance is "to shape EU discussions around maximum residue limits for Mancozeb." The alliance is [also registered](#) in the U.S.

Dear MEPs: In the letter, the lobby says that Latin American producers of bananas "depend" on mancozeb to supply 91 percent of EU demand and warns that the decision on banana MRLs will "determine" bilateral trade and also "political relations between the EU and Latin America, as for some countries banana trade forms a key aspect of their economies."

Lobby response: In a written statement to Morning Agri, A&G said current mancozeb residues in bananas were "negligible" and that its goal was to "provide EU decision-makers with accurate information and resources on commercial banana production and distribution ... Rules that restrict the safe use of mancozeb would impose significant hardships in the production and supply of bananas and local economies throughout Latin American growing regions," it said.

****You are still on time to [register for the POLITICO Pro Briefing Call "Les premières avancées de la Présidence française de l'UE"](#) on February 1 at 2 PM CET. POLITICO journalists will review the ongoing negotiations on the Digital Services Act, digital sovereignty issues, trade defense instruments, and the European green taxonomy. This call will be held in French.****

PIGMEAT CRISIS

COMAGRI WARNS CRISIS COULD HARM EU GREEN AGENDA: If the EU Commission takes no action to help crisis-hit EU pig farmers, it risks dealing a blow to its own green and sustainable food agenda, the European Parliament's agriculture committee warned, in a [letter](#) to EU Agriculture Commissioner Janusz Wojciechowski.

Background: A mix of high input prices, an ongoing African Swine Fever (ASF) outbreak and a resulting drop in demand from lucrative overseas markets, such as China, have created a perfect storm for the EU's pig farmers. The EU Commission and member countries have for months been in a back and forth over how to respond.

Farmers pushed to the limit: In their letter, MEPs said the situation has "squeezed profit margins to critically low levels," putting the resilience of the sector to an "extreme test." Among others, they want Brussels to up promotion of pigmeat in order to find market outlets for pig farmers.

Too much pigmeat: The lawmakers said the Commission needed to act immediately to find an outlet for the glut of pigmeat sitting in EU farms — or risk setting back its own green plans. "Continued inaction ... would lead to further concentration of pork production in the EU and creation of centres of heavy industrial pork production with all negative environmental, climate and regionalisation effects in full contrast to our Green Deal and Farm to Fork objectives and ambitions," they wrote.

All eyes on SCA? In a press conference last week, Wojciechowski said the pigmeat issue would be addressed at today's meeting of the Special Committee of Agriculture.

PLANT-BASED FOOD

EU PLANT-BASED FOOD LOBBY EYES CHINA: The EU plant-based food sector has been abuzz after China — one of the biggest consumers of meat and eggs in the world — [included](#) lab-grown meat and other "future foods" (such as plant-based eggs) in its five-year agricultural strategy.

Wake-up call: Alex Holst, policy manager for the Good Food Institute Europe, a lobby group, said that the fact that China included plant-based technology in its plan on how to maintain food security should be a "wake-up call" for the EU. "Cultivated meat was pioneered by European scientists — but China is now positioning itself as a future world leader in this field," he told Morning Agri in a statement. "To meet their climate targets and realize the benefits of this European innovation, the EU and national governments must follow China's forward-thinking example by investing in sustainable protein R&D — before they get left behind."

FAST FOOD

Has plant-based food peaked? The FT [is wondering](#) what the future of the lab-grown food industry is.

Posh pasta: Reuters has [this story](#) on how Barilla, the world's largest pasta maker, is turning to a new high-end pasta to keep up with consumers' tastes.

Post-Brexit antibiotics: The U.K. risks falling behind on reducing farm antibiotics after EU ban, the Guardian [reports](#).