

USDA Foreign Agricultural Service

GAIN Report

Global Agricultural Information Network

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Austrian Agricultural Symposium 'Wintertagung 2016'

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Report Highlights:

In the week of February 8, the most important Austrian agricultural symposium, the 'Wintertagung 2016' took place. The symposium is a platform to discuss current developments, challenges and opportunities for the agriculture and forestry sector. Labeling of origin / geographic indications, the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership and the Russian sanctions were key topics at the event.

In the week of February 8, the most important Austrian agricultural symposium, the “[Wintertagung 2016](#)” (Winter Meeting 2016) took place. The symposium is a platform to discuss current developments, challenges and opportunities of the agriculture and forestry sector and is organized by the [Ecosocial Forum Austria](#), a think-tank promoting an ecosocial market economy with focus on agriculture. Eleven meetings at various locations in Austria discussed specific issues and agricultural commodities. Traditionally the symposium starts with an agricultural policy and market outlook presented by high-level Austrian agricultural politicians, other stakeholders and guest-speakers from the EU Commission or other EU member states.

This year’s overall motto of the “Wintertagung” was: “There is no cheap – always someone has to pay (or to lose out)”. The president of the Ecosocial Forum Austria, Stephan Pernkopf explained the motto in his introduction. He stressed on higher production costs due to high animal welfare and environmental standards in Austria which someone has to pay for or lose out on animal welfare or environmental protection by buying cheap products from destinations with lower production standards.

Speakers included Austrian agriculture minister - Andrae Rupprechter, the director-general of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development - Jerzy Bogdan Plewa, the president of the Ecosocial Forum Europe - Elisabeth Koestinger, and the president of the Austrian Chamber of Agriculture - Hermann Schultes. All speakers highlighted the outstanding high quality of Austrian food products and the need of labeling the Austrian origin. Consumers would be willing to spend more money for high value products when they know about the Austrian origin and the high production standards. Rupprechter once more emphasized on the importance of geographic indications (GIs) and reported about the implementation of a simplified Austrian application procedure for GIs with the intention to increase the number of Austrian GIs.

The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (T-TIP) was an important topic at the entire symposium and was mentioned by almost all speakers. In general, they all agreed that this partnership would be positive for Austria since the agricultural and food industry sectors are highly export oriented. As repeatedly stated on various occasions, Rupprechter again laid great stress on accepting the partnership only if certain red lines (most importantly: genetically modified organisms (GMOs), hormone treated meat, GIs, sensitive sectors like pork and dairy) are not crossed. He maintains that no deal would be better than a bad deal.

There was big concern among the speakers on ongoing Russian sanctions and lost exports. Rupprechter in particular said that the Austrian government would undertake substantial efforts in order to ease the sanctions.