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EC increases cash aid for E.coli farmers

The European Commission has increased its cash package for Europe's farmers affected by the E.coli outbreak.

Brussels increased the sum to £187 million to compensate farmers contending with poor sales and dumping of produce over potential contamination.

The rise - which will be backdated until May 26 - was announced soon after a ceiling of £135 million was set for the aid package.

Speaking at a Brussels press conference, EU Agriculture Commissioner Dacian Cioloş said the source of the outbreak had not been identified.

He added: "The source of the E.coli epidemic is still not known but the priority is to stop the health crisis and restore consumer trust.

"But at the same time we must avoid a situation where entire sectors such as vegetables are unjustly affected by the situation: we cannot abandon the farmers."

He said the new higher sum being made available represented up to 50% of the average value of the relevant fruit and vegetables between 2008-2010, instead of 30% on the basis of the previous proposal.

Payments would be made to farmers who are either members of producers' organisations or who are registered with a sales contract and have suffered losses.

The Commission, he said, would "take stock" of the scale of claims at the end of June.

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