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EU considers trade deal with Canada

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Minister for Agriculture Simon Coveney has said that any bilateral trade deal with Canada would have to take account of “fair play” in terms of market access.

“I think that there is support to finding an acceptable conclusion to that deal but not at any price,” Mr Coveney said yesterday following a meeting of agriculture and fisheries ministers in Brussels.

The proposed trade deal was discussed at length at yesterday’s council meeting, chaired by the Irish Minister.

EU trade commissioner Karel De Gucht travels to Ottawa next week for discussions on a proposed Canadian-EU trade deal.

The European Commission hopes to conclude an agreement with Canada, following almost four years of negotiations.

The proposals could see 97 per cent of tariffs on goods removed initially, increasing to 99 per cent after seven years. Any deal would need the approval of European national parliaments and the European Parliament.

The deal could increase trade between the two blocs by 20 per cent.

Market access

Granting Canada access to Europe’s beef and pork markets, and allowing European dairy producers to export to Canada, have been among the most contentious issues.

The Irish Farmers’ Association yesterday expressed concern about the impact of an EU trade deal with Canada on Irish agriculture, arguing that the introduction of tariff-free Canadian imports into Europe would cause “significant market damage” for Irish exports into the European Union, particularly in the beef and pig meat sectors.

“There can be no one-sided deals in which large volumes of beef and pig meat are offered to Canada, while they offer very modest market access for EU exports, such as dairy products,” IFA president John Bryan said, calling for European standards to be imposed on Canadian products.

Japan

The EU is also set to begin discussions with the US and Japan, with progress expected on both during the Irish presidency of the European Council.

The European Union is Canada's second-largest trading partner, while Canada is Europe's 12th largest.

Trade between the two blocs was \$117 billion in 2011.

Speaking after yesterday's meeting of agriculture ministers, Mr Coveney reiterated his intention to secure agreement on the Common Agricultural Policy by the end of the Irish presidency.

While he received "strong endorsement from other ministers" for the proposed time-frame, he stressed that ministers would need to "prioritise, make compromises, and find solutions to outstanding issues".

Securing agreement also depended on the successful conclusion of discussions on the EU budget, due to be held at next week's summit, he added.