PRESS RELEASE

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EU SUGAR SECTOR CALLS FOR SUGAR TO BE EXCLUDED FROM EU–THAILAND TRADE AGREEMENT

Ahead of the tenth round of negotiations on the EU–Thailand Free Trade Agreement, European beet sugar manufacturers and sugar beet growers are urging the European Commission to fully exclude sugar from the agreement. Further liberalisation would expose an already vulnerable EU market to global distortions and imports produced with Thai government support and under significantly lower environmental, social and regulatory standards.

The European sugar market already grants substantial access to third-country suppliers. For the 2026/27 marketing year, more than 1.1 million tonnes of sugar will be available duty-free, alongside over 543,000 tonnes of low-duty raw sugar imports. ACP and LDC countries also benefit from duty-free, quota-free access. Granting additional preferential access to Thailand – the world's second-largest sugar exporter – would further depress prices, disrupt market balance and increase pressure on a sector already facing significant challenges.

A level playing field does not exist between EU and Thai producers. As of February 2026 Thailand permits 133 active substances banned in the EU. International organisations, including the International Labour Organisation and Human Rights Watch, have also documented labour exploitation, child labour and debt bondage in Thailand's sugarcane sector. Thailand's sugar industry additionally benefits from state interventions, including domestic price controls and support mechanisms such as the Cane and Sugar Fund. These concerns recently led Vietnam to extend anti-dumping duties on Thai sugar for a further five years.

"European growers and manufacturers have invested heavily to meet the world's strictest environmental, food safety and labour standards. It is unjust to force our sector to compete on a profoundly uneven playing field," said Guillaume Gandon, President of CIBE.

The threat is amplified by Thailand's immense export capacity. Thailand exports around 70% of its sugar production to more than 120 countries, making it the world's second-largest sugar exporter. Unlike many trade partners that mainly export raw sugar for refining, Thailand is also a highly competitive exporter of white sugar.

"With 21 factories closed since 2017 and sugar prices down nearly 40% since negotiations with Thailand began in September 2023, our ability to absorb further market shocks is exhausted," said Giovanni Tamburini, President of CEFS. "Sugar production is essential to Europe's food security. Once factories close and skilled rural jobs disappear, that strategic industrial capacity cannot easily be rebuilt."

The EU sugar market is already among the most open in the world, while European producers continue to face regulatory and sustainability requirements that are not matched by competitors in Thailand. To safeguard fair competition and preserve the resilience of a strategic sector, the European Commission must ensure that sugar remains fully excluded from the EU–Thailand trade agreement.

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