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[01] Prime minister Karamanlis briefed by agro-development minister

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Prime minister Costas Karamanlis on Friday met with agricultural development minister Evangelos Bassiakos, who briefed him on ministry matters.

Speaking to reporters after the meeting, Bassiakos announced that subsidies to farmers would begin being payed starting Wednesday in 20 prefectures throughout the country in which the correctional procedures with the Agricultural Cooperatives Unions have been completed, as well as the on-the-spot surveys conducted by the Prefectural authorities on the basis of the EU's new Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

He said payments would also have started in the remaining prefectures if the above requirements had been completed there as well.

However, Bassiakos added, an effort was being made for the first time, with the assistance of the Subsidies Monitoring and Payment Organisation (OPEKEPE), to accelerate the full payment of the subsidies by Easter.

Bassiakos also said that the ELGA (state agricultural insurance fund) will begin payment of compensations for cotton and sugar-beet crops damaged in October's floods.

He noted that the payment of the subsidies was within the relevant timetable, despite the complexity of the new CAP system, which, as the minister reminded, had been approved by the Greek EU presidency in 2003 (under the then PASOK government).

Bassiakos further said that, due to the cooperation with the Panhellenic Confederation of Farming Cooperative Unions (PASEGES), whose board of directors unanimously endorsed the ministry's handling, and the other relevant agencies, the timely payment of subsidies to the farmers has been achieved.

The minister also stressed that the absorption of funds earmarked for Greece under the EU's Third Community Support Framework (CSF) has improved "spectacularly", from 17 percent in March 2004 to 57.3 percent today.

There was also a spectacular increase in organic farming, as well as in crops cultivated under the Comprehensive Management method, Bassiakos said.

Greece, he said, had a comprehensive advantage in the production of competitive products capable of being exported, under auspicious terms, to foreign markets, noting that such exports in 2005 had reached 24 percent in 2005, rising to 29 percent in the first eight months of 2006 alone.

