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France's Le Foll Says Wheat Protein Level 'Major' Export Issue

By Rudy Ruitenberg - Oct 11, 2013

[France's](#) soft-wheat quality is a "major issue," with relatively low protein levels hindering competition in export markets, Agriculture Minister Stephane Le Foll said.

"We know we have a problem on the positioning, which is the quality," Le Foll said in remarks at the European Commodities Exchange in Paris today. "The level of protein is very important."

Average protein levels in France's soft-wheat crop fell to 11.2 percent this year from 11.4 percent in 2012 after a wet spring, according to crop office FranceAgriMer. [Algeria](#), France's biggest export client, typically seeks protein content of at least 11 percent for its imports of soft wheat and Egypt, the leading global buyer of the cereal, demands 11.5 percent, according to Dijon Cereales, a grain cooperative.

French soft wheat had record average protein of 12.5 percent in 2003, followed by levels above 12 percent in the three years through 2007, FranceAgriMer data show.

"There is a major issue on the quality of our wheat," Le Foll said. "The large Mediterranean market is for wheat to make bread, and there is competition."

[Egypt](#) in tenders in the past three months favored wheat from Romania, Ukraine and [Russia](#) over supplies from France.

The minister said he's "clearly heard from the industry" that wheat protein levels hinge on nitrogen application. Le Foll said increased use of the fertilizer can carry environmental risks, and improved seed and using different wheat varieties could also help lift protein.

Le Foll said yesterday France is working with Algeria on plans for an agricultural market information system for the Mediterranean region, and first proposals may be made next month.

The minister said he's seeking a regular exchange of agriculture information, "which doesn't exist today," and partners would include European countries as well as [Turkey](#) and the countries of North Africa's Maghreb region.

"Strengthening cooperation and having a statistical database is absolutely necessary," Le Foll said. "I want there to be agricultural cooperation in the Mediterranean."

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