

Romet Räsä, a grain farmer from Tartu county and owner of Habemiku farm in Vönnu rural municipality has been awarded the Farmer of the Year 2015 title by the President Toomas Hendrik Ilves.

Respectable farmers help to maintain life in Estonian villages and smaller locations, said the Head of State. According to the President, our farmers help consumers to choose local food, which is valuable to the local economy and is healthy.

President Ilves also acknowledged the very high level of our agricultural education and recalled that the Estonian University of Life Sciences is among the best universities in the world in its sphere; it is also in the top one per cent of the most often quoted and referred research institutions.

The Head of State admitted that the situation is most acute in the current crisis for our dairy and pig farmers, and the incident of farmers with 101 tractors descending on Toompea was a plea for help due to serious concerns and problems.

He repeated the words that he spoke at the opening session of the Riigikogu in September: the Parliament and the Government must view our agriculture within the general European Union context and, therefore, find the means and measures to support Estonian farmers.

"The state has not turned a blind eye. This year, farmers will be given emergency crisis assistance of more than 10 million euros. The budget of the Ministry of Rural Affairs for the next year includes 4.6 million euros in additional support. The regulations of the European Union will also allow us to pay additional forms of transition support of a total of 21 million euros. The amount of this support that will find its way to the state budget will be determined by the political choices of the Government and the Parliament," said President Ilves.

It would be simple, yet dangerous, considering the future of livestock breeding, to leave farmers in a situation that is unequal compared to producers from other European Union countries. Competition is very tough in the market of agricultural production and taking the easy way here would result in travels along much bumpier and unchartered roads in the future, warned the

Head of State.

"All of this, as I have previously stated, comes down to the survival of both our farmers and our rural life in general – the availability of work and a livelihood for people," he said, in describing the problems of zone 3 pig farmers as an issue to be handled and settled urgently, as sales restrictions will otherwise destroy the work done by farmers who run their farms properly and in compliance with all the standards.

"The state will organise the procurement of domestic meat to make some canned meat, which is the right and good thing to do. However, I have heard that pork is being imported to Estonia at the same time. Agricultural organisations – how do you feel about this? The Prime Minister, the Minister of Rural Affairs and the Chairman of the Rural Affairs Committee of the Riigikogu have all criticised such behaviour. What about you?" asked President Ilves.

He described co-operation among farmers as an issue that is highly important for the future of agriculture. Farmers must stand shoulder to shoulder and pool their efforts for the purposes of both processing and marketing, as this will help to achieve a fairer price for production and ease the situation of farmers in future crisis situations, emphasised the Head of State. Perhaps co-operation will help the Government find new markets for our agricultural produce, as the production of Estonian farmers may be good and of high quality, yet everyone who can or has to do this should co-operate in order to win some new markets, he encouraged.

President Ilves thanked all the farmers and said: "You have defied bad weather, trade restrictions on markets that were once familiar grounds, swine fever, your own back ache and the weariness of your family. You have remained standing and you also keep up the agriculture of Estonia and our rural life."

Farmer of the Year 2015, grain farmer Romet Räsä, has developed his Habemiku farm in Võnnu rural municipality into an exemplary agricultural enterprise. He cultivates more than a thousand hectares, growing winter wheat and rapeseed. He began production at the site of his historical family farm, built new production facilities and keeps the surroundings nice and tidy. Romet Räsä carries out excavation and land reclamation works on the lands in the vicinity. He works the fields with the company owned by his son, Siim. He has contemporary farming and amelioration equipment and has built two grain drying facilities.

Rural life organisations suggested 13 nominations from nine counties for this year's competition of the Farmer of the Year, which was organised – for the 15th time – by the Estonian Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce and the rural gazette, Maaleht.

Office of the President
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