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NEW POLICY APPROACHES TO INCREASE FRESH FRUIT AND VEGETABLES CONSUMPTION

Food and nutrition experts urged European decision makers for a novel approach to agriculture and food policies as existing ones are currently inappropriate to translate the recognised beneficial assets of fruit and vegetables into effective consumption practice. A new policy focus would generate great economic gains in Europe, improve returns for the sector and create multiple benefits for the society as a whole. These are the main conclusions of a policy discussion which took place last week in Brussels.

Freshfel Europe and Aprifel coordinated last week a policy discussion at the European Parliament. Hosted by Miss Anthea McIntyre MEP (rapporteur of “*The future of Europe’s horticulture sector: strategies for growth*” report), the event gathered several members of the European Parliament, European Commission officials, experts in nutrition and health, as well as fresh produce representatives.

The benefits of consuming fruit and vegetables have long been recognised, and they are the only foods recommended as such in written dietary guidelines. Increasing the intake of fruit and vegetables is a crucial component of a healthy diet and plays a major role in the prevention and reduction of the major economic, societal and personal costs induced by non-communicable diseases (NCDs). Fruit and vegetable consumption, with other dietary improvements, benefits health and longevity, reduces the impact of socio-economic inequalities, lowers medical costs and is recognised by the World Bank and the European Office of the World Health Organisation (WHO) to be crucial for optimum economic growth in Europe.

Dr. Godfrey Xuereb (WHO) noted: “*It is alarming that in most EU Member States average fruit and vegetable consumption is below the minimum WHO recommendation of 400 g/day/person. Heads of State and Governments of the United Nations consider fruit and vegetable intake increase one of the challenges to be targeted by 2025.*”

Freshfel Annual Consumption monitor data shows that one piece of fruit or vegetable per day/person has been lost in the last decade. Philippe Henri, President of Freshfel stated: “*Under these circumstances, policy makers need to urgently join forces with scientists and the sector to reverse such a trend. New political and policy efforts need to be considered to foster prevention.*”

Professor Philip James (International Obesity Task Force) was also adamant: “*It is the perfect time to change the agriculture and food policies of Europe for economic benefits, and it is all the more important to do this in the current time of economic crises when diets are often deteriorating badly.*”

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A multi-dimensional approach is needed to move from policy awareness of the widespread dietary deficiency to efficient strategies for the economic benefits of producers and other operators in the fresh produce chain. A number of market oriented policy initiatives were therefore suggested in areas such as nutrition, research and innovation, information and promotion policies. The meeting called upon the European Parliament to set up an expert group to drive the process under the next parliamentary legislation starting next June.

Miss McIntyre MEP concluded: *“This meeting was an excellent opportunity to raise important issues that have been highlighted in my report and which are so relevant for the fruit and vegetables sector. Fruit and vegetables account for 18% of the total value of agricultural production in the EU and are produced from only 3% of cultivated land. The sector is worth more than € 50 billion, with 80 million tons produced and distributed by 550,000 employees. I am delighted that my report could be a starting point for a wider debate across Europe to make sure that we can move with a holistic approach from awareness into action!”*

Note to the Editors: Freshfel Europe is the European Fresh Produce Association. For more information, contact Philippe Binard (General Delegate) or Raquel Izquierdo de Santiago (Director Food Law, Nutrition & Health) at info@freshfel.org or visit the association website www.freshfel.org. Aprifel is the French Agency for Research and Information on Fruit and Vegetables. For more information contact Saida Barnat (Scientific Director) at s.barnat@interfel.com or visit the website www.aprifel.com.



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