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Public Consultation on EU funds in the area of investment, research & innovation, SMEs and single market

Freshfel Europe, the European Fresh Produce Association, is the Association representing the fresh fruit and vegetable supply chain in the European Union and is registered in the transparency register under the reference: 1637225479-02. We incorporate more than 150 direct members and associated members, including companies and national associations of producers, shippers, exporters, importers, distributors, retailers, and their service providers. Through the membership of national associations, we have a wide, representative outreach of the EU production and trade.

Our mission is to create a favourable environment for the fresh fruit and vegetables sector, to facilitate the competitiveness of fresh produce, to improve the efficiency of the supply chain, to assist operators complying with the highest food and plant safety rules, to enhance the position of fresh fruit and vegetables in international trade as well as in research and innovation, and to secure a favourable environment to promote the benefits of fresh produce, with the ultimate goal of stimulating the consumption of fresh fruit and vegetables. As a representative of the complete supply chain, we strive for a competitive business environment, for a good coordination, transparency, and exchange among all the relevant stakeholders, and to secure that the sector adheres to the highest quality to satisfy the consumers.

In order to increase the competitiveness of the agricultural sector, and to ensure that the European Union maintains its high food safety standards, investment in Research and Innovation is needed. The current Horizon 2020 programme aims to tackle these challenges via the pillar Societal Challenges 2 'Food security, sustainable agriculture and forestry, marine and maritime and inland water research and the bioeconomy'. This need for agriculture-related research and the necessity to turn this research into practical innovations was reverberated in the recent Communication on the Future of Food and Farming: 'The needs and contributions of rural areas should be clearly reflected on the research agenda of the European Union and the future CAP will need to enhance even more synergies with the Research and Innovation Policy in fostering innovation'.¹ In light of future challenges, Research and Innovation should also invest in sustainable initiatives. Fruit and vegetables are the ideal commodity from a sustainable perspective: First, they contribute to a healthy population, by delivering nutritional value, and protection against cardiovascular and other, non-communicative diseases. Second, the European fruit and vegetable sector only takes up 3% of the total land use, whilst producing around 20% of the

¹ Communication on the Future of Food and Farming, p12

total agricultural output. The sector is in an ideal position to tackle future challenges for demographic growth and food security.

Given the importance of Research and Innovation for tackling future challenges, the budget should, if not doubled as recommended by the Lamy report, at least be maintained, as indicated on many occasions by Commissioner Oettinger. However, in order to justify the budget spent on Research and Innovation, the research outcomes should serve the citizens. To ensure that the citizens can reap the benefits of these outcomes, the innovations should not just reach the right people, but the industry should also be more involved from the start in creating a proposal, as they have first-hand knowledge of what is needed in their sector. The industry should therefore be placed in the driver seat of the proposed innovation or research proposal. An essential factor for tempting businesses to participate and for highlighting the benefit for their business and industry at large is to reduce the administrative burden significantly.

Apart from more industry involvement, clear communication towards the citizens is essential for the uptake as well. For this, the multi-actor approach and dissemination towards the right target audience is key. However, installing the so-called mission-oriented research projects to reach and involve the citizens in Research and Innovation could have a harmful effect on certain sectors. The fruit and vegetable sector could serve as an example: As the fruit and vegetable industry is small and fragmented, there are fears that these big proposals won't be able to meet the particular needs of the sector and it will lose out compared to larger, more concentrated sectors. The trend towards big multi-product projects does not allow to bring the particular difficulties of the sector to the forefront.

The fruit and vegetable related research community recently gathered, coordinated by Freshfel and AREFLH (the European Assembly for the regions producing fruit and horticultural products), in Brussels for a conference on the research priorities for the fruit and vegetable sector. The takeaway messages were that on the one hand, the multi-actor approach was lauded. Not only does it support a strongly-knitted sector, it also makes sure that the whole supply chain is included in the project's objectives and aims and that the project has a supply chain approach. On the other hand, however, the group pointed out the negative points of a general approach on the specifics of the fruit and vegetable sector. The recommendation from the Lamy report on mission-oriented R&I is therefore worrying from this perspective.