



STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESS

FRESH FIRST: placing fresh fruit & vegetables at the HEART of EUROPE's FUTURE

1 SECTOR ► MORE THAN 170 DIFFERENT PRODUCTS, EACH DELIVERING A DISTINCT SET OF HEALTH, ENVIRONMENTAL, AND ECONOMIC BENEFITS.

On 16 September 2026, the State of the Union Address to the European Parliament will cover matters highly relevant to the European Union's future direction. Ahead of this debate, Freshfel EUROPE calls on the European Commission and the European Parliament to match ambition with consistency.

The EU's health, climate, environmental, and economic ambitions all converge on one sector - **FRESH FRUIT & VEGETABLES** - and yet that sector is still treated as an afterthought. This is **not just an oversight; it is a political failure**. The fresh produce sector delivers across every major EU priority and must finally be recognised as the strategic asset it is. Fresh produce is part of the solution to many societal concerns. It is **time to embed fresh produce at the heart** of the CAP reform, MFF negotiations, Omnibus X debate, and the broader policy agenda.

EVIDENCE IS UNDENIABLE: fresh fruits and vegetables deliver exceptional health benefits with a minimal environmental footprint. Beyond these assets, they remain among the most cost-effective food choices available.

Despite these benefits, EU consumption remains at roughly half the recommended level, struggling against the aggressive marketing of ultra-processed alternatives. **While framing future European priorities, EU institutions have a critical, narrow window to pivot the current legislative agenda and place fresh produce at its core.**

THREE REASONS FRESH PRODUCE DESERVES A CENTERED PLACE IN EU POLICY:

HEALTH: fresh fruit and vegetables offer the greatest nutritional benefits of any food category, yet EU consumption remains far below recommended levels. As healthcare costs from diet-related disease become unsustainable, Freshfel EUROPE calls on the EU to anchor fresh produce in its prevention strategy against non-communicable diseases, with comprehensive consumer education.

ENVIRONMENT & CLIMATE: food systems drive 34% of global GHG emissions. Shifting diets towards fresh fruit and vegetables can cut emissions by up to 75%, while offering low-emission and carbon sequestration potential that supports climate neutrality targets. Shifting to fruit and vegetable production could reduce agricultural land use by up to 75% and lower water use by up to 50%.

ECONOMY: fruit and vegetables already generate over 15% of EU agricultural value output and underpin economic activity in rural areas. Yet, they receive less than 3% of CAP support. Scaling up support and consumption of one of the most affordable food categories available would deliver a significant return on investment and keep the sector attractive for generations' renewal.

CALL FOR ACTION: The EU institutions should have a **"FRESH FIRST" approach, placing fresh fruit and vegetables at the centre** of a more sustainable food system. Freshfel EUROPE's enclosed **MANIFESTO** sets out priorities to unleash the sector's full potential by leveraging its nutritional and environmental assets, while helping this essential sector remain attractive and competitive in an unpredictable business landscape.

**Freshfel EUROPE urges EU policymakers to position
FRESH FRUIT AND VEGETABLES
as the unifying principle across all policies at the heart of Europe's future**

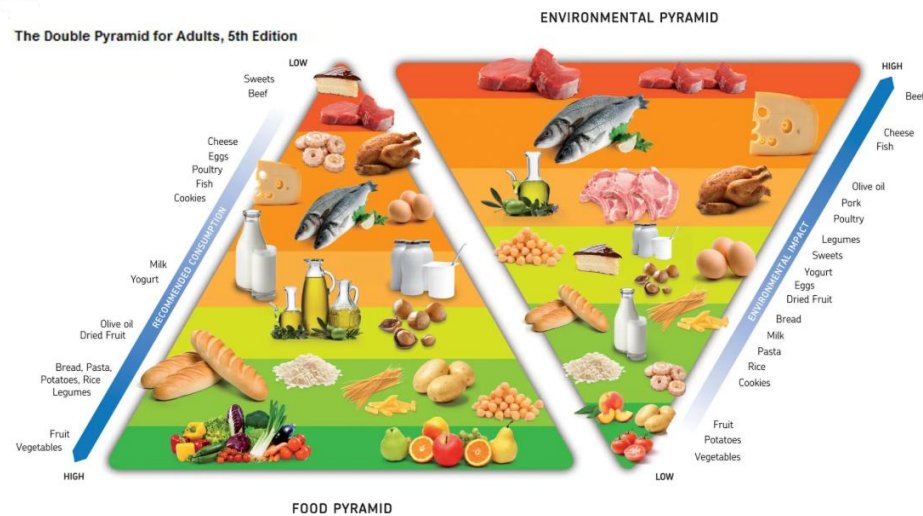
HEALTHIER PEOPLE. GREENER PLANET. STRONGER ECONOMY.
"FRESH FIRST" - the WIN-WIN-WIN policy the EU needs now and for the next generations

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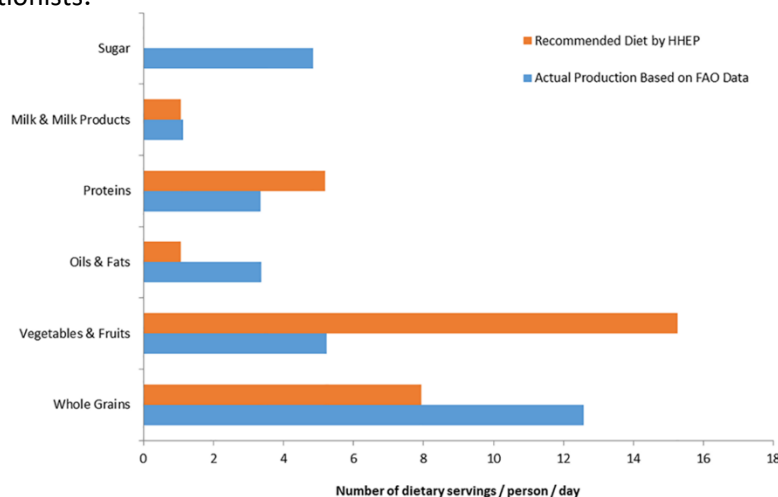
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FOOD FOR THOUGHT

The “Double Pyramid Model” was developed by the Barilla Center for Food and Nutrition to raise awareness about the environmental and nutritional impact of foods. The model demonstrates how fresh fruits and vegetables with the highest health benefits are also the ones with the lowest environmental impact.



When too much isn't enough: does current food production meet global nutritional needs? (Bahadur et al., 2018) Current agricultural production fails to provide the mixture of foods needed for the world's population to have the type of balanced diet recommended by nutritionists.



Freshfel Europe Consumption Monitor 2026: The average fruit and vegetable consumption in the EU stands at 355 g/capita/day, and only 5 Member States reach the minimum recommended intake set by the World Health Organisation (WHO) at 400 g/capita/day. However, many Member States' guidelines recommend higher intakes while several institutions and scientists advocate 800 g/capita/day: 400 g for health and an additional 400 g for the planet.



Consumption

