

For immediate release

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DEDICATED FRESH PRODUCE SUPPLY CHAIN IS SERVING CONSUMERS FROM FARM TO FORK

To better understand and value the price of fresh fruit and vegetables, consumers should be aware that the way “from farm to fork” is not as simple as it is often thought to be. Various actors within the fresh produce supply chain, which are represented at the European level through Freshfel, play a crucial role to ensure consumers are getting a large diversity of tasty products in the best possible quality at any time and any place. However, given the freshness and perishability of fresh produce, the sector ensures at the same time that the supply chain is as short as possible and only as long as necessary.

In today's modern societies, consumers are demanding and are used to have access to fresh produce any time and at any place, no matter if it is a large supermarket, a small corner shop, a street market or in a restaurant. To secure and offer a diverse range of fresh, tasty and high quality fruit and vegetables the way “from farm to fork” is consequently not as short and simple as it is often thought to be. Ramon Rey, President of Freshfel Europe, explains: *“Consumers often consider fresh fruit and vegetables as traditional and raw products coming directly from producers. As they are unprocessed, paradoxically consumers consider these products to be “too expensive”, and fail to perceive any added value brought by the chain. Consumers seem to be prepared to pay for processing costs, marketing and packaging costs when purchasing other foodstuffs, but questioning these costs for fresh produce. There is an immanent need for the fresh produce sector to better communicate that the story is not so simple and that behind the product there is a specialised, professional and dedicated supply chain to best serve consumers.”*

The supply chain for fruit and vegetables consists of various actors, which all have a crucial role to play in handling close to 100 million tons on a yearly basis in the EU-27. Producers provide functional qualities and quantities desired by the market, have a key role in rural development and are active in orchard management and harvesting. Once harvested, packers, traders and logistics providers are needed to collect the produce, to check its quality and homogeneity, to sort, clean, package, store, label, etc. As fresh produce is going to diverse outlets (supermarkets, street markets, food services (restaurants, canteens, schools, hospitals, etc.)) wholesalers and distributors have a crucial role for the proximity of the supply and to provide products corresponding to quantitative and qualitative expectations of these specific customers. Finally, supermarkets and other outlets, where final consumers are purchasing their products, are responsible for the assortment and merchandising of the produce, for their storage with a view of preventing waste etc.

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Freshfel estimates that in the chain and excluding producers the sector represents close to 550.000 employees active in individual companies in the EU-27, many of them being SME's (small and medium enterprises). Other businesses, such as seed and crop protection companies, labs for analyses of residues and/or nutritional value, experts in logistics and packaging companies etc. offer moreover highly important services at all stages of the fresh produce value chain.

Therefore, the price of fresh fruit and vegetables is not only formed by offer and demand, but also influenced by different cost factors within the supply chain. These costs should allow to secure the viability of the chain, such as production operations, labour costs at all stages, the first placement on the market as well as structural (logistics, energy, losses, etc.) and infrastructure costs. Luc Clerx, chairman of Freshfel's Promotion, Communication and Image Committee, commented: *"Public perceptions too often simplify the way from farm to fork, without recognising the important roles all actors of the supply chain play to ensure a tasty, healthy and high quality product. In the end, these simplified assumptions are misleading consumers as they fail to value accordingly the price fresh fruit and vegetables have. One should have in mind that the supply chain is already today as short as possible and as efficient as needed to take the full benefit of the high level of competence and know-how available across the chain to best serve consumers."*

ENDS

Note to the Editors: Freshfel Europe is the European Fresh Produce Association, representing the interests of the fresh fruit and vegetables supply chain in Europe and beyond. Freshfel Europe currently has over 200 members, including both companies and associations. For more information, contact the association at info@freshfel.org or visit the association website www.freshfel.org.



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