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FRESHFEL DENOUNCES SIMPLISTIC AND ILL-COORDINATED EU HEALTHY EATING CAMPAIGN

This week the Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development, Mariann Fischer Boel, launched a new Healthy Eating Campaign for European school children, basing its message exclusively on the consumption of milk and fruits and vegetables. Freshfel Europe, the European Association of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables, finds that the message of the campaign is inaccurate and wonders if resources are being spent wisely.

The newly launched campaign is to run alongside the EU's School Fruit Scheme and School Milk Scheme, promoting the consumption of fruit, vegetables and milk products in schools, as constituting a healthy diet and to help prevent overweight. According to Freshfel, given the specificities and differences of these two school schemes, as well as the different marketing resources available to these two product categories, the approach should have been distinct.

Raquel Izquierdo de Santiago, Freshfel's Food Policy Advisor, stated: "*Information on a balanced diet is more complex than just milk and fruit and vegetables. Addressing schools talking only about these two categories together it is not appropriate nor comprehensive from a nutrition perspective*." By principle, communicating on "balanced nutrition" – which is intrinsically linked to the problem of obesity – cannot be limited to giving information on two single food categories of the food pyramid (in this case, fruit and vegetables and dairy products). No single food (or two given foods) can provide all the essential nutrients that the body needs to be healthy and function efficiently. Therefore, such an approach is incorrect and potentially misleading from a scientific point of view.

Other voices from the sector have also denounced the complete lack of coordination with current national initiatives. Nigel Jenney, Chief Executive of the UK Fresh Produce Consortium (FPC), and member of Freshfel's Board, said: "*It is frustrating to see a lack of an integrated strategy from the EU through to national Governments which would have delivered better value and ensured a lasting impact on our children's diets rather than a "flash in the pan" campaign.*"

Freshfel is further concerned about the launch of this campaign at a time when so much work still needs to be done for the good functioning of the School Fruit Scheme. An annual budget of €1.3 million was made available by the Council to enhance the communication and networking at EU level around the School Fruit Scheme, and so far close to nothing has been done in this respect. Philippe Binard, General Delegate of Freshfel continued: "*We are rather disappointed that a dedicated pan-European website for fruits and vegetables is not yet in place to accompany the start of the scheme. We are still hoping that a networking meeting among officials, Member States and stakeholders, will be set up by the Commission before the end of the year for a first review of the situation, exchange of best practice and possibly to motivate those who have not yet embarked on a programme to prepare projects for the next school term 2010-2011.*"

ENDS

Note to the Editors: Freshfel Europe is the European Fresh Produce Association, representing the interests of importers, exporters, wholesalers and distributors, and retailers of fresh fruits and vegetables 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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