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FRESHFEL SETS ITS PRIORITIES IN CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY DEBATE

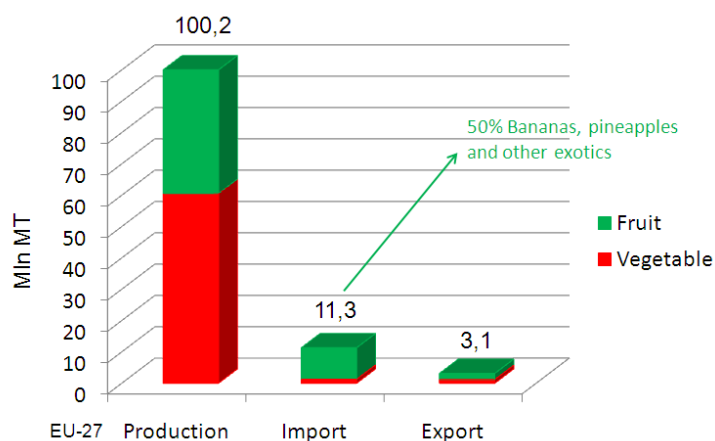
As the debate on climate change is gaining momentum on the political agenda, Freshfel has held a dedicated workshop to review the various aspects of this complex dossier and its implications for the fresh produce sector. The stance of the sector is clear: Fresh produce is part of the solution in tackling climate change. The debate should remain objective, avoid an emotional stand point with simplistic messages and take the complexity of the dossier into account.

Freshfel Europe, the European Association for the fresh fruit and vegetable sector, confirmed with this dedicated workshop its commitment to efficiently contribute to the debate on climate change and environmental sustainability and to make recommendations on the way forward. The reduction target of greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) of 80% by 2050 will imply a change in the behaviour which will touch the whole sector and all stakeholders.

The fruit and vegetable sector has been proactive in developing sustainable agricultural practices to cope with increased requirements from consumers and is continuously looking for improvements in the supply chain. Our sector has seen the highest uptake of organic and integrated farming systems and is addressing its GHG emissions through the establishment of a carbon footprint methodology and carbon offsetting schemes. Freshfel Europe is taking the matter seriously by assisting its members to understand the various implications of the dossier and coordinating research efforts.

The association thereby stresses the need for an integrated policy approach to food supply, based on life-cycle assessments and the consideration of wider social and economic implications. Frederic Rosseneu, Freshfel's Food Quality Advisor, stated: *"Freshfel is wary of a dogmatic debate resulting from simplistic messages such as buying local, seasonal and organic. Indeed today's supply is already largely local and/or seasonal (see enclosed chart), making it more a perception issue that diverts the attention away from real solutions."* Ultimately, the climate change debate should not be taken as a tool for protectionism or favour a particular growing method which will always be detrimental to the category as a whole and reduce unnecessarily the choice of consumers.

Promoting local produce is more a perception issue than a real problem area



Source: Eurostat/Faostat figures based on the average of the last 5 years

Acknowledging the complexity of the debate, EU food chain partners, including Freshfel, have set up a joint initiative, the Food Sustainable Consumption & Production Roundtable, in order to collectively address the challenges regarding assessment methodologies and communication tools, while also exchanging best practices. A European or even an international approach is a must to avoid the proliferation of solutions and schemes which will ultimately add confusion and cost to the chain. Public authorities should show leadership for a common solution with an integrated policy approach rather than focus on simplistic messages and certain food segments.

Freshfel members consider that environmental labels are not the best way forward for the fruit and vegetable category given the complexity of the supply chain and associated costs. The carbon and environmental footprinting tools will rather help the sector to identify problem areas and solutions and to assist clients and retailers to meet their Corporate Social Responsibility goals.

Finally, in all of these discussions on climate change and environmental sustainability, the health and nutritional aspects should not be overlooked. As the record of fresh produce on carbon footprint is excellent compared to other food categories, public authorities should join forces with stakeholders to stimulate a change of attitudes and motivate consumers to move their habits towards fresh fruit and vegetables. Philippe Binard, General Delegate of Freshfel, stated: *“Our product could indeed be not only an essential contribution for improving the health of consumers but also moving towards a better environment, which will help to address the climate change challenge. Fresh produce is definitely part of the solution.”*

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.