



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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EU COMMISSION'S PRAISE OF ABOLITION MARKETING STANDARDS ADDS INSULT TO INJURY

Last week the European Commission proudly announced its delivery on cutting red tape imposed by EU legislation, citing among others the abolition of 26 fruit and vegetable marketing standards saving up to 970 million EURO to fruit and vegetable producers. While many in the fruit and vegetable business would have liked to save this amount of money, the announcement shows once more the Commission's lack of understanding of the sector, as the decision eventually ended up adding costs in the chain. The decision to remove 26 marketing standards was adopted by the Commission at the end of last year despite wide opposition of Member States and the sector.

On 1 July 2009, Regulation 1221/2008 entered into force, introducing a revamped framework of marketing standards for fruit and vegetables. The new rules keep only detailed marketing standards for the 10 leading products in terms of volume, while introducing basic conformity checks to secure that all other fruit and vegetables are safe, sound and of marketable quality. The Commission widely campaigned that the new scheme would simplify legislation and cut red tape.

Today it is obvious that the new rules have not simplified operations nor reduced the administrative or financial burden for the sector. Indeed - according to Freshfel estimates - new controls and paperwork have even been introduced in some of the Member States for up to 400 fruit and vegetables to verify that all products are sound, safe and of marketable quality. Freshfel estimates that an additional import volume of 1.8 Million T of often small consignments needs to be checked according to these basic criteria, confronting the sector not only with additional checks and paperwork for issuing conformity certificates but also with unnecessary costs.

Freshfel General Delegate Philippe Binard commented: *"The Commission's claim of savings worth 970 million EURO (2% of the EU F&V production value!) for the sector adds insult to injury to a sector suffering from a crisis which today touches most agricultural commodities. The idea that fruit and vegetable producers would no longer have to grade their products because of the abolition of EU marketing standards is telling for the ill-preparedness with which this decision was taken. The lack of legislation has been filled with contractual clauses referring to the very same provisions of the legislation and some operators now even have to apply standards they never before had to under EU legislation"*.

The Commission justifies the savings in the fresh produce sector as growers and packers will no longer have to spend on average two hours for the grading and labeling per ton of produce. *"Such assertion demonstrates the lack of understanding of the fruit and vegetable market by the Commission. Grading will continue despite the removal of EU marketing standards and on the other hand the trend of labeling obligations imposed upon the sector is rather on the increase with an inflation of labeling requirements related to safety, nutrition, environment,..."* Mr Binard added.

EUROPEAN FRESH PRODUCE ASSOCIATION A.I.S.B.L

The above clearly illustrates the Commission's decision was taken without conducting an in-depth impact assessment of the new rules. Only recently, the Commission launched a call for tender with a 180.000 EURO budget to conduct a study assessing the validity of the arguments against or in favour of repealing marketing standards. Pending a more detailed evaluation, a lower communication profile would have been advisable to avoid misleading information. Indeed out of the Commission calculation, the alleged savings of 970 million EURO for the fruit and vegetables sector represent 12% of the total savings worth 7.6 bln EURO realised by cutting red tape at EU-level. No doubt that under these challenging times, the sector would have been keen to enjoy savings of close to 1 bln Euro!

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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.