

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **TIME FOR A CHANGE IN FRUIT & VEGETABLE TRADE RELATIONSHIP WITH CHINA**

**Freshfel Europe has today called upon the Chinese authorities to speed up the negotiation process of plant health protocols to facilitate the market access to China for a wide diversity of European fresh fruit and vegetables. This statement was made on the occasion of the “2009 Forum on Fruit and Vegetable Inspection and Quarantine” in Guangzhou, China, organized by CIQA (China Entry-Exit Inspection and Quarantine Association) and AQSIQ (General Administration for Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine) and with the participation of senior officials from the Chinese entry-exit administration. Freshfel called for greater reciprocity in F&V trade with China. Trade remains today hampered by stringent plant health requirements imposed by China upon imports, and the accession of China to the WTO has not brought about the expected trade liberalisation. There are no doubts that the fresh produce sector of both the EU and China would benefit from a more balanced trade relationship.**

Current figures show that the bilateral fresh produce trade between China and the EU is marked by a lack of reciprocity and a rapidly growing trade deficit for the EU. In the last 5 years, EU fruit and vegetables imports from China have risen from 476.000 tonnes in 2003 to 750.000 tonnes in 2008 while EU exports to China remain at extremely low levels, moving during the same period just from 7.900 to 15.000 tonnes. Europe exports to China just 0.066% of its fresh fruit and vegetable total exports. Despite a strong and diversified EU production and a population representing only 35% of the Chinese population, the EU imports six times more fruit and vegetables than China, with 16 times more when the respective population is taken into account.

This trade imbalance partly results from exacerbated safety concerns by the Chinese with complex procedures in place to overcome these concerns. Philippe Binard, General Delegate of Freshfel, stated: *“Before initiating any exports, EU exporters need to conduct a detailed, costly and time consuming Pest Risk Analysis product by product and Member State by Member State, a process which must be endorsed and controlled by Chinese authorities. Some of these processes have taken in the past up to 10 years before being completed - a restrictive import legislation that sharply contrast with the EU market access conditions. This widely explains the current imbalance in trade flows.”* A Freshfel representative at the Forum also highlighted to the international audience attending the conference that *“despite a more trade oriented plant health scheme, the EU production is not necessarily exposed to greater risks resulting from imported goods. The EU fruit and vegetables production adheres to strict quality and safety rules due to the official legislation in the area of plant health rules as well as on active substances and MRLs and their sustainable use. Furthermore, additional private standards (GAP/GDP, social and environmental schemes, etc.) help to reinforce the quality of EU produce.”* He added: *“Moreover, the EU strictly controls both imported and exported goods, further reinforcing the guarantee of safety of the produce.”*

Freshfel underlined that the limited number of plant health protocols and their restrictive terms is a real obstacle towards a more balanced trade with China. Negotiating market access by product and by Member State often leads to excessive, restrictive, duplicated or costly measures for European exporters. Freshfel also laments the lengthy process of negotiation and the lack of flexibility of the negotiated schemes to respond to new market demands and opportunities. As a way forward, Freshfel urges the Chinese authorities to move towards greater transparency in its legislation, to facilitate recognition of EU controls to avoid duplication of measures and to move towards cost effective solutions allowing for a simplification and relaxation of the registration procedure for EU exports of fruit and vegetables to China.

A more open market stimulating competition will not only improve the quality of Chinese produce and gear local production to higher standards, but will also provide Chinese consumers with a wider variety of quality fresh fruit and vegetables on the Chinese market.

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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](mailto:info@freshfel.org) or visit the association website [www.freshfel.org](http://www.freshfel.org).