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25 November 2009

A CLIMATE SMART DIET STARTS WITH FRUIT AND VEGETABLES

Two weeks ahead of the UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen, the Swedish EU Presidency organised a conference on Climate Smart Food, which was attended by Freshfel and representatives from the fruit and vegetables sector. In a presentation the sector once again highlighted the fact that what many people overlook is that consuming fruit and vegetables is already today a climate smart way of feeding the world's population. Both consumer and environmental groups stressed the importance of eating more fruit and vegetables during the conclusions of the conference.

As the debate on climate change is gaining momentum on the political agenda two weeks ahead of the UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen, a climate smart food conference was held in Lund, Sweden, on 23 and 24 November, hosted by the Swedish EU Presidency. Around 200 participants discussed the climate impact of the entire food chain, with a view on production, trade, wastage and consumer awareness. As global food production from farm to fork is currently estimated to account for 25 to 30 per cent of total consumption related greenhouse gas emissions, there is indeed a need to reduce this figure. In this respect the F&V sector representative highlighted in his presentation the fact that the consumption of fruit and vegetables is an essential part of a "climate smart" diet. On average most fruit and vegetables outperform other food products when it comes to their carbon footprint (see table below).

Food item	Carbon footprint (kg CO₂e/kg)
Fresh fruit	3,40
Fresh green vegetables	1,67
Beef	19,30
Cheese	13,86
Coffee	13,62
Milk	3,52
Pork	13,89
Fresh potatoes	1,88

Source: Barrett J, Vallack H, Jones A, Haq G (2002):
A material flow analysis and ecological footprint of York.

Nevertheless, the sector acknowledged that improvements are possible at all levels of the supply chain, from production level through transport and logistics to the consumer, but emphasised that it is already undertaking huge efforts in this regard.

The conference once more highlighted the sheer complexity and many uncertainties of the debate, casting doubt on the feasibility and effectiveness of certain labeling schemes currently in place. Furthermore, a label solely taking into account the carbon footprint of products might be ill-conceived, as a one-sided focus on climate change might lead to negative impacts on other environmental issues (land use, pesticide use, water use, packaging, etc.). Frederic Rosseneu, Freshfel's Food Quality Advisor, stated: *"The relevance of environmental labels in general remains uncertain as they might be too complex for consumers which are mostly not interested and do not have enough time to consider complex messages. For operators there is also 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, as well as support certain marketing initiatives.”

While the complexity of the debate still represents a major hurdle towards communication to the public, consumers are looking for concrete information and advice on how they can make a difference in addressing climate change. In this light, Freshfel was pleased to hear both consumer and environmental groups calling for increased fruit and vegetables consumption as an undisputed, easy and healthy way for consumers to address climate change. Philippe Binard, General Delegate of Freshfel, stated: *“We are glad other stakeholders acknowledge the fact that fresh produce is part of the solution in tackling climate change. Our product is indeed not only an essential contribution for improving the health of consumers but also moving towards a better environment.”*

More information on the proceedings of the conference is available from se2009.eu/climatesmartfood.

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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.