



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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EUROPEAN SCHOOL FRUIT SCHEME: FOCUS ON FRESH FRUIT AND VEGETABLES

The proposal by the European Commission on the implementation rules for the establishment of a European School Fruit Scheme has been endorsed on Tuesday by the Member States in the Management Committee for the Common Organisation of Agricultural Markets. This opens the door for the launch of the scheme in several Member States as of September 2009.

Freshfel Europe, the European Association for the fresh fruit and vegetable sector, congratulates the European Commission on its efforts to approximate the position of the various Member States, and welcomes this initiative as one of the tools to address the alarming rise of obesity across Europe. Laurence Swan, chairman of the Freshfel Promotion, Communication and Image Working group stated: *"The 2008 Freshfel Consumption Monitor* confirmed that unfortunately the consumption of fresh fruit and vegetables across Europe continues to decrease. Such a trend is a worrying element not only for the fresh produce sector but also from a health perspective for the European population."* As children are particularly affected by this negative consumption trend, the setting up of a pan-European framework to secure the availability of fresh fruit and vegetables at school to the youngest is therefore an important policy development.

The effect of the under consumption of fresh produce, combined with other factors such as an inadequate diet rich in sugar, salt and fats, as well as the lack of physical activity, is leading today's society to face in the future a major health challenge with a growing part of the population being overweight or obese. The rise in childhood obesity is already reaching epidemic levels all across Europe with nearly a quarter of overweight children being obese and medically at risk of several diseases. Consequently and according to Freshfel, one of the key aspects now for the success of such a scheme will be for Member States to organise the distribution of the right products at the right time. Ramon Rey, President of Freshfel stated: *"The provision of the regulation excluding fruit and vegetable products with added sugar, salt or fat from the programme is crucial in the fight against obesity. It gives a clear priority to fresh fruit and vegetables under the supervision of national health authorities"*. Freshfel believes that such a focus is a core element of the programme and will help children become acquainted with the diversity, quality, taste and texture of fresh fruit and vegetables. Ramon Rey added: *"We also consider as an important achievement that the consumption of the fresh fruit and vegetables will in priority be done at a dedicated moment and at a different time than the main meal. This should maximise the benefit and experience for the children and secure that the programme leads to additional intake of fresh produce in children's' diets"*.

Freshfel welcomes these developments which are in line with the European Parliament's Niels Busk MEP Report on the Council regulation setting up a School Fruit Scheme, adopted by plenary on 18 November 2008. This report, specifically highlighted the need to set a priority for fresh fruit and vegetables in the distribution programme to schools. Freshfel urges Member States to strictly adhere to these core principles and also to support the programme with a strong communication campaign to raise awareness of this important initiative.

*see abstract attached

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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