

PRESS RELEASE

17 MARCH 2006

FRESHFEL EUROPE RESPONSE TO COMMISSION'S GREEN PAPER "PROMOTING HEALTHY DIETS AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY"

Freshfel Europe this week submitted the fruit and vegetables sector's response to the European Commission's Green Paper entitled "Promoting healthy diets and physical activity: a European dimension for the prevention of overweight, obesity and chronic diseases". The Green Paper directly responds to the European Council's request to elucidate ways to promote better nutrition within the European Union which may be followed up by proposals to attain these goals.

Philippe Binard, General Delegate of Freshfel Europe: *"There is a wealth of scientific publications from around the world that demonstrate the health benefits to consumers from increasing their daily intake of fresh fruit and vegetables. Many public institutions (e.g. WHO, FAO, European Parliament and European Council) clearly recommend that fresh fruits and vegetables must be better promoted to raise their consumption. The Commission Green Paper represents a unique opportunity to adjust European policies and reinforce the role of fresh fruit and vegetables in the diets of Europeans. Freshfel strongly believes that the fruit and vegetable sector can play a significant role in a future European nutritional policy. Fresh fruit and vegetables must receive adequate political recognition for the significant role they have in helping to combat obesity and obesity-related disorders"*.

The response to the Green Paper was elaborated according to a Freshfel business plan submitted earlier this year to the European Commission's Health and Consumer Protection Directorate General, which suggested a three-fold approach to encourage improved consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables, to:

- raise consumers' awareness to the health benefits of regularly eating fruit and vegetables through a pan-European campaign,
- develop an educational scheme targeting children at school throughout Europe; and
- increase availability of ready-to-eat fruits and vegetables outside of the home, such as the development of specific vending machines to distribute fresh fruit and vegetables and the focus on nutritional consideration within public procurement and tendering rules for catering contracts.

The Freshfel contribution to the present Commission Green Paper outlines a set of policy recommendations that the European Union should urgently consider, including:

- a significantly increase in European finances available for the promotion of fresh fruits and vegetables under the Common Agricultural Policy;
- influencing Member States to reduce VAT on fruits and vegetables to 0%, as it is already the case in Ireland and the UK;
- the establishment of an EU regulatory framework to restrict the advertising of foods high in sugars, fats and salt to children through TV, magazines, the internet, mobile phones, in-school marketing or new media;
- the implementation of ambitious campaigns to distribute fresh fruit and vegetables to children through EU education policy and accompany this increased access by parallel motivation and communication campaigns to modify children's long-term eating habits;
- setting a simple EU framework for nutrition and health claims, and ensure that fresh fruit and vegetables intrinsic properties can be promoted without restriction given their undisputed unique health benefits;

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- a robust EU research policy to assist varietal developments to improve quality and convenience as well developing technology to increase access to fresh fruits and vegetables, e.g. securing the distribution of fresh produce in tailor-made vending machines; and
- undertake strong risk communication to highlight the safety of fresh fruits and vegetables. For example, Freshfel believes that DG SANCO and the European Food Safety Authority must better communicate the considerable inherent safety margins in residue limits of plant protection products, to enhance industry and consumer confidence and verify that residue monitoring data are not misused to negatively affect fruit and vegetable consumption.

The Green Paper and the overall discussion within the European Platform on Diet, Physical Activities and Health provides a unique opportunity to address changing lifestyle and re-position fresh fruit and vegetables consumption within this new challenging environment. According to Laurence Swan, Chairman of the Freshfel Working Group on Promotion *“The benefit on the health of European citizens through increased consumption of fruits and vegetables would undoubtedly be disproportionately high and would lead to significant savings in social security costs across Europe. It is of primary importance that the present momentum is harnessed to develop, with the support of all relevant public and private sectors’ stakeholders, a wide range of actions and coherent messages to improve the diets of EU citizens in the long-term”.*

ENDS

Note to the Editors : Freshfel Europe is the European Fresh Produce Association, representing the interests of fresh produce importers, exporters, wholesalers and distributors, and retailers in Europe and beyond. Freshfel Europe currently has over 170 members, including both companies and associations. Freshfel’s work is organised on the basis of its four divisions: Import, Export, Wholesale and Distribution, and Supply Chain and Retail. In addition, Freshfel Europe has set up various working groups. For more information, please contact Philippe Binard at the Freshfel Secretariat at info@freshfel.org.