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FRESHFEL EUROPE'S VICE PRESIDENT HIGHLIGHTS THE ADDED VALUE OF TRADE IN MEETING EUROPEAN CUSTOMER REQUIREMENTS

Philippe Henri (Creno, France), Vice-President of Freshfel Europe, represented the European Fruit and Vegetable Association at the Annual Conference of WUWM (World Union of Wholesale Markets) which took place in Palma de Mallorca (Spain) from 14 to 17 September 2010. During his intervention at the conference, Mr Henri stressed the key role of the various trade segments to meet the increasingly complex requirements of supply chain customers and the end consumers.

The three day conference of WUWM in Palma de Mallorca focused on future trends and opportunities for wholesale market innovation and business activities, and how global supply is able to meet demand of all kinds. The conference gathered representatives of wholesale markets from around the world as well as representatives from public authority operators of the various sectors active on wholesale markets. Philippe Henri, Vice President of Freshfel Europe, represented the views of the fruit and vegetable sector at the conference.

Mr Henri highlighted the paradoxes of today's situation for the fresh produce sector. Public authorities fail to value the benefits of legislation leading as a consequence to a proliferation of private standards, and at the same time consumer confidence is being eroded by the actions of NGOs. It can however be advocated that the fruit and vegetables placed on the market have never been as safe as today. Philippe Henri stated: *"Most of the monitoring and food safety reports indicate that fruit and vegetables adhere to strict food safety requirements enshrined in the European legislation, which are further enhanced by certification schemes. Residue monitoring shows that exceedance of Maximum Residue Limits are decreasing while active substances are becoming safer and the use per hectare of these substances is significantly declining."*

In the complex situation of proliferation of food safety and other environmental standards, the various operators across the supply chain are providing added value to the chain and play an increasingly important role to cope with the heterogeneity of requirements. Wholesalers, exporters and importers are providing their unique expertise to producers and end customers, are contributing to balance supply and demand on the market, are assisting to meet customer requirements, are providing added value for packing and distribution and also play an important pedagogic and educational role in the chain.

The Palma Conference concluded that wholesale markets and their operators play a vital role in the supply chain. The various segments of the trade provide guarantees to the entire supply chain as well as the end consumers that fresh produce meets the highest level of safety and quality. The trade at large not only represents an important economic activity but is also an essential partner in providing to consumers produce that matches the rapidly evolving customer requirements. Mr Henri concluded: *"While today many advocate for short and local distribution channels linking producers directly to consumers, such an approach fails to recognize that the fresh produce supply chain is a value chain, based on proximity, which secures to consumers the widest and the safest choice of fresh produce."*

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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.