

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

16 October 2008

## **FRESHFEL DENOUNCES NGO SCAREMONGERING ON FRUIT AND VEGETABLE SAFETY**

Freshfel Europe, the European Fresh Produce Association, deeply regrets the scaremongering tactics of some NGOs to influence the current political discussions on future authorization rules for pesticides with unnecessary alarming news on pesticide residues. Yesterday some NGOs released figures of the upcoming Commission's report on the 2006 pesticide residues monitoring programme suggesting that 49% of the food samples tested had detectable residues, of which 4,7% above the Maximum Residue Level (MRL) <sup>1</sup>.

Freshfel strongly refutes claims suggesting half of fruit and vegetables in the EU are contaminated with pesticide residues. For enforcement reasons, control agencies take more samples of food items that are expected to contain pesticides or to exceed MRLs, the **figures are thus not representative of the actual market situation**. Moreover since the report covers 2006, many MRL-exceedances can be attributed to non-standardised MRLs in the EU. This commercial problem has been solved since 1 September 2008 with the full implementation of regulation that harmonises all MRLs in the EU.

Consumer safety risk assessments have demonstrated that the **presence of some residues in food does not put consumers at risk**. It cannot be stressed strongly enough that products exceeding legal limits are unacceptable to all operators in the food chain even if this does not necessarily imply a particular health risk. A plethora of controls are already in place to verify that these products do not reach the consumer. The sector remains committed to achieving low levels of residues and producers multiply efforts towards integrated production. Frédéric Rosseneu, Food Safety adviser at Freshfel Europe says: ***"While we understand that consumers would prefer not to have any residues at all in their food, this is not always possible in practice"***.

Confidence in the safety of fruits and vegetables must not be eroded given the **overwhelming health benefits a diet rich in fruits and vegetables brings** and its role in combating obesity and related disorders such as cardiovascular diseases, liver diseases, etc. According to Philippe Binard, General Delegate of Freshfel Europe, *"improving the diets of Europe's citizens could have huge financial benefits, as the social and health costs relating to obesity across Europe amount to 150 billion EURO each year"*.

Freshfel fully acknowledges the need for updating EU pesticide legislation, to provide for a continued high level of consumer protection. Philippe Binard continues: ***"We support the Member States' compromise which provides appropriate health and environmental protection, and are continuing to work constructively to achieve a satisfying result for all stakeholders in the European Parliament."***

\*\*\*\*\*

---

<sup>1</sup> To enforce pesticide legislation, Maximum Residue Levels (MRL) are set for each product. Too often consumers wrongly assume that their health is at risk because they misconstrue MRLs as safety standards that are set to protect their health, while in fact **MRLs are trading standards**. The European Commission published a multi-lingual factsheet on MRLs which is available from [http://ec.europa.eu/food/plant/protection/pesticides/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/food/plant/protection/pesticides/index_en.htm) .

**Note to the editors:**

Freshfel Europe is the European Fresh Produce Association, representing the interests of operators across the supply chain of fresh fruits and vegetables in Europe and beyond. Freshfel Europe currently has over 200 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 on specific food topics incorporating the views of European experts. For more information, contact the association at [info@freshfel.org](mailto:info@freshfel.org).