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SUPPLIERS STATEMENT AT THE EUREPGAP CONFERENCE 21 SEPTEMBER – PRAGUE

Comments submitted on behalf of fresh fruit and vegetables suppliers, represented in leading international production and trade associations such as AREFLH, COLEACP/PIP, Freshfel Europe, SHAFFE and WAPA.

About Good Agriculture Practice and GAP harmonisation

Today, and despite efforts undertaken by EurepGAP, the fruit and vegetables sector is confronted with an on-going proliferation of quality assurance schemes. As a result, the sector is facing increased costs and uncertainties to move forward. Moreover, the sector needs to comply with a multiplicity of criteria which are often interpreted and implemented differently. Consequently, to prevent a further proliferation of systems, suppliers urge all the concerned parties to undertake more efforts to foster harmonisation and mutual understanding across the chain and to focus the endeavour exclusively on food safety, the initial objective of GAP which is often forgotten. In this process, it is important to remind that food safety can not be used as an instrument of competition among retailers.

In recent years, suppliers multiply commitments to ensure GAP and food safety. These efforts should be further sustained by best practices applied at retail level. Food safety should be guaranteed at all stages until the products are offered to consumers. Retailers should therefore ensure that food safety is maintained down to the retail shelf, as inappropriate handling or practice at the final distribution stage could expose produce to microbiological risks or quality deterioration. Good retail practice should be introduced to address this concern.

As EurepGAP is currently revising its protocols, suppliers urge EurepGAP to work in full transparency and to be aware about cost implications for the sector of proposed measures. EurepGAP should work towards a greater simplification of its rules and take into consideration the concerns of suppliers, such as those related to the database.

It is important that the fresh produce supply chain cooperate to minimize food safety risks and that together the sector takes full advantage of the many assets of fresh fruit and vegetables with a view to increase consumption, which is today at best stagnating.

About the Plant protection products and their residues

Crops need to be protected by plant protection products (PPPs) to ensure that safe, affordable and sound quality produce are offered to consumers. GAP is based on the sound and responsible use of PPPs. Maximum residue levels (MRLs) are set to facilitate trade. MRLs are therefore not safety limit.

Regarding PPPs and MRLs, several issues remain unsolved and urgently need to be addressed:

- The delay in the registration process of PPPs:

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- The absence of solutions for a number of minor uses and unprovided uses
- The lack of EU harmonisation of MRLs and import tolerance and consequently the delay in the fixing fair and safe limits
- The development of non regulatory MRLs requirements set by retailers, a process which undermine consumer confidence and jeopardize the EU harmonisation process
- The exposure of the sector to disproportionate media coverage on residues issues affecting the fruit and vegetables sector

To stimulate supply chain cooperation and identify common approach, suppliers recommend the setting up of a forum in cooperation with EurepGAP. Such a forum should focus its activity on a wide range of topics ,which could include - on a non exhaustive basis – the following matters:

- The examination of the pros and cons of PPPs, and issue accordingly technical statement
- The exchange and the promotion of technical and scientific information relating to PPPs and MRLs and ensure appropriate dissemination of the information across the chain.
- The harmonisation of MRLs and the determination of import tolerance at EU level as a tool to secure free trade and increase the consumption of fresh fruit and vegetables
- The stimulation of networking and mutual understanding between growers, traders and retailers on basic matters
- The vulgarisation of technical statements into communication statements
- The coordination of the lobby to public authorities to solve issues of minor uses

Final remarks

The fruit and vegetable sector should today concentrate its efforts on increasing the consumption of safe and competitive fresh fruit and vegetables. Selling more fruit and vegetables will not only benefit the entire supply chain, it will also directly benefit consumers and public authorities at a moment when fighting obesity is probably one of the major public health challenges.

Upon this background, AREFLH, COLEACP/PIP, Freshfel Europe, SHAFFE and WAPA urge EurepGAP to continue reinforcing its relationship with suppliers to set cost effective, transparent and attractive solutions for the fresh fruit and vegetables sector.

The EurepGAP secretariat is asked to act these important suppliers' remarks in the official minutes of the meeting.

AREFLH: Assemblée des Regions Europeennes Fruitières, Legumieres et Horticoles

COLEACP/PIP: Inter-professional Association of Exporters, Importers and other Stakeholders of the EU-ACP Horticultural Trade

Freshfel Europe: European Fresh produce Association

SHAFFE: Southern Hemisphere Association of Fresh Fruit Exporters

WAPA: World Apple and Pear Association

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