



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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PREVENTING OBESITY STARTS WITH FRUIT AND VEGETABLE CONSUMPTION

On the eve of the first European Obesity Day on 22 May (<http://www.obesityday.eu>), Freshfel Europe takes the opportunity to insist on the relevance of a diet rich in fresh fruit and vegetables in preventing obesity. Encouraging better diets and more physical activity are the most promising ways to fight against the obesity epidemic. In this context fresh fruit and vegetables can make an important contribution, as they are naturally low in calories, high in fibre and likely to replace energy-dense, nutrient-poor foods.

In most countries of the EU more than half of the adult population is overweight or obese, with figures rising to 60% among people aged 50-70 years. Estimates suggest that three million European schoolchildren are obese, with some 85,000 more becoming obese every year. Obesity causes a range of chronic diseases, among which are diabetes, various cancers and heart diseases. The costs of ill-health due to obesity and linked diseases are high, accounting for up to 6% of total health sector bills in the EU Member States. Added to this there are wider additional economic and social costs related to loss of productivity, absence at work, family costs of caring for obese sick relatives, etc. Philippe Binard, General Delegate of Freshfel, stated: *"It is conventional wisdom that the root of the problem is the combination of increasing calorie intake coupled with decreasing levels of physical activity and a more sedentary way of life. Encouraging better diets and more physical activity are therefore the most promising ways to ease the current situation. A diet rich in fruit and vegetables is the ideal start in preventing obesity. Unfortunately, the consumption of fresh produce is at best stagnating and is in many Member States well below the minimum WHO recommendation of eating at least 400 grams of fruit and vegetables a day."*

The European-wide public awareness day aims to drive actions at a European level to address the epidemic of obesity. As there exists no easy solution to the problem due to expensive and largely unsuccessful treatments, prevention is presented as the best long-term solution. Raquel Izquierdo de Santiago, Freshfel's Food Policy Advisor, explained: *"Increasing scientific evidence indicates that fruit and vegetables are important components of a healthy and balanced diet and their sufficient daily consumption could help prevent major diseases as well as help in the prevention of obesity and related disorders."*

Freshfel Europe is therefore active at the European-level to foster and initiate initiatives which aim to increase the consumption of fruit and vegetables, as done recently in the course of the EGEA conference (www.egeaconference.com) with a call to build up an ambitious European strategy to reduce inequalities in fruit and vegetable consumption in particular in low income populations and among the young as these two target groups are particularly vulnerable to inadequate diets. Ramon Rey, President of Freshfel Europe, commented: *"It is of paramount importance that actions are undertaken at an EU-level as much remains to be done. The European institutions should be much more active in disseminating information on the health benefits of fruit and vegetables. In addition, any initiative in this field will be only successful if it is accompanied by convincing and comprehensive communication activities."*

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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.

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