



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **FRESHFEL SUPPORTS AN AMBITIOUS FRUIT SCHOOL SCHEME**

**The European Parliament adopted yesterday the Niels Busk Report on the setting up of a framework for a pan-European School Fruit Scheme. Freshfel Europe, the European Association for the fresh fruit and vegetable sector has always been supportive of such a proposal as one of the tools to address the alarming rise of obesity across Europe. The stagnation of the consumption of fresh fruit and vegetables across Europe is a worrying element and the youngest are particularly affected by this trend.**

In the last few months, Freshfel has strongly supported and cooperated with the European Commission to elaborate a pan-European Fruit School Scheme. The proposal should increase the availability of fresh fruit and vegetables to the youngest in the school environment. According to Freshfel, such move is a big step in the right direction. It could assist to reverse the obesity epidemic which today concerns 22 million children across Europe, among which more than 5.1 million are severely overweight. A school fruit scheme would stimulate European children to adopt healthier diets and eating habits by being acquainted from their early years to the taste and texture of fresh fruit and vegetables.

The vote of the parliament yesterday is clearing the way for the formal adoption of the Fruit School Scheme by the Agriculture Council of Ministers today. In view of this important decision by the Council, Freshfel wrote to the representatives of the 27 Member States to urge them to further reinforce the Commission proposal in line with the most ambitious approach taken by the European Parliament.

Philippe Binard, General Delegate of Freshfel stated: *“The Commission proposal is built upon the distribution of one piece of fruit per child per week during the school term. To have an impact and change eating habits among the youngest, the Commission proposal remains insufficient. Freshfel therefore supports the Parliament position that fruit should be made available every day of the week to secure the greatest efficiency of the measure”*. While the Commission proposal suggested a total budget of EUR 156 million (EUR 90 million being the EU contribution), the European Parliament endorsed an ambitious yearly budget of up to EUR 500 million to build a more comprehensive and efficient programme across Europe with daily deliveries to children. The European Parliament report underlined that *“prevention is cheaper than treatment”*. Such a budget as that proposed by the Parliament remains consequently reasonable compared to the billions of Euros of costs incurred by the social security of Member States as a result of citizens being overweight which entails greater risk of cardiovascular disease, diabetes, high blood pressure and certain forms of cancer.

In its statement to the Council, Freshfel also reiterated the relevance of setting a priority for fresh fruit and vegetables in the distribution programme to schools. While the Commission proposal remains open to a wide category of fruit and vegetables including processed fruit and vegetables, Freshfel Europe is advocating that in line with the philosophy of such a scheme, the measure should primarily target fresh produce. Dr Laurence Swan, Chairman of the Freshfel Promotion, Communication and Image Working Group stressed *“The school fruit scheme is an excellent opportunity to get children acquainted with eating fresh produce and discovering the wide variety of taste and texture of fresh fruit and vegetables, whilst also taking the full benefits of all the healthy assets of these products”*. Dr Swan continued: *“Freshfel is advocating raising the consumption of fresh fruit and vegetables across*

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*Europe to the WHO's recommendation of at least 400 grams per day, if not 600g as recommended by many experts. The data available to Freshfel indicate that today more than 2/3 of the EU-27 Members States remains below this WHO's minimum recommendation". Freshfel therefore welcomes the launch of a fruit school scheme which could among other instruments contribute to reverse this trend. "Freshfel expects that the school fruit scheme will be implemented with all the necessary tools and budget and with the right focus to make it successful and really make the difference", Dr Swan concluded.*

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**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).