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FRESHFEL CALLS EUROPEAN COMMISSION TO URGE GERMAN AUTHORITIES TO WITHDRAW RECOMMENDATIONS NOT TO EAT SPECIFIC VEGETABLE CATEGORIES

Freshfel Europe has today called the European Commission to urge German authorities to withdraw without delay recommendations not to eat specific vegetable categories. Maintaining such recommendations without concrete scientific evidence that tomatoes, cucumbers or salads are associated with the outbreak is placing discredit on the sector with a devastating impact on the image of fresh produce towards consumers and is having a severe impact on the whole business.

In a letter to Agriculture Commissioner Dacian Ciolos and Health and Consumer Commissioner John Dalli Freshfel Europe has called today the Commission services to urge the German (Federal & Regional) authorities to withdraw without delay recommendations not to eat specific vegetable categories. While it remains of the utmost importance to identify the source of the contamination, there is at this point – and despite the fact that fresh produce have been the most tested among all food categories – no concrete scientific evidence that tomatoes, cucumbers or salads are associated with the outbreak. German authorities are however maintaining clear recommendations towards consumers not to eat raw the above mentioned vegetables (e.g. Bundesamt für Verbraucherschutz und Lebensmittelsicherheit, Bundesinstitut für Risikobewertung, Bundesministerium für Ernährung, Landwirtschaft und Verbraucherschutz, etc.).

Luc Clerx, chairman of Freshfel's Promotion, Communication and Image Committee, stated: "*In absence of any scientific evidence, recommendations not to eat in Germany certain fresh vegetables is placing discredit on the sector with a devastating impact on the image of fresh produce towards consumers. A punctual outbreak without an identified source is casting doubts on a specific food category without confirmed scientific back-up nor the evidence that there would be a structural problem in fresh produce.*"

Sales of lettuces, cucumbers and tomatoes plummeted across Europe to reach in some of the most affected Member States a level of 20 to 30% of the seasonal volume. Prices witness peak low levels as well. Any efforts from the sector to remedy this appalling market situation and to stimulate the consumption are hindered by these on-going official messages. Neither in-store promotion nor communication campaigns can be undertaken by the sector as long as these messages remain in place.



EUROPEAN FRESH PRODUCE ASSOCIATION A.I.S.B.L

Av. de Broqueville 272 bte 4 - 1200 Brussels - Belgium Tel: +32 2 777 15 80 - Fax: +32 2 777 15 81
info@freshfel.org - www.freshfel.org - www.enjoyfresh.eu - www.freshquality.org - www.freshcongress.com





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Philippe Binard, General Delegate of Freshfel, added: *"Withdrawing these messages is also an essential step along the compensation measures currently discussed by the Commission to assist growers. However, and according to Freshfel, public authorities will also have to embark into a strong communication campaign to restore consumer confidence into fresh produce and gear the sector out of this crisis."*

Note to the Editors: Freshfel Europe is the European Fresh Produce Association, representing the interests of the fresh fruit and vegetables supply chain 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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