

## **Freshfel Europe urges EU capitals to continue to welcome seasonal workers**

As the effects of the COVID-19 outbreak continue to unfold across Europe, Freshfel Europe welcomes the discussions of the Informal Agriculture and Fisheries Council on free movement of goods and critical workers. Freshfel Europe urges EU capitals to now find EU-wide solutions to ensure the movement of goods and critical agricultural workers in the Single Market.

Freshfel Europe strongly supports the consensus among Member State Ministries on the need to guarantee the integrity of the Single Market, which is a crucial issue for the fresh fruit and vegetables sector. To translate this agreement into practice it is essential that EU capitals implement the European Commission practical guidance on the EU green lanes with a matter of urgency to ensure that highly perishable fresh produce crosses internal EU borders in a maximum timeframe of 15 minutes.

Freshfel Europe would also like to highlight the discussion during the Informal Council meeting on the need for free movement of seasonal workers within the EU and also from neighbouring countries. Freshfel Europe urges Member State Ministries to take immediate and coherent action to secure the availability of professional workers for the upcoming harvests. There is an urgent need for workers for many vegetable products as well as for other highly demanded products such as asparagus and strawberries. The fruit season is also beginning which requires a complete seasonal workforce. This is an urgent matter to resolve as for some products the season is advanced by a number of weeks due to weather conditions over the past months.

Freshfel Europe urges EU capitals to continue to welcome seasonal workers from other EU and neighbouring countries on a formal manner. This critical staff is necessary to ensure food security in Europe during the COVID-19 outbreak. These measures should be accompanied by strong medical supervision of incoming workers, which should be harmonized across Europe. Furthermore, support



from Member State governments should be envisaged to secure safe transport, work and accommodation of these workers.

Freshfel Europe underlines the role and work of the European Commission so far to guarantee the supply of fresh produce to EU citizens and requests that any new measures, including on seasonal workers, are implemented with a pan-European approach that prevents distortion of competition between growers.

Freshfel Europe warns Member States that the imposition of unilateral bans on the entry of professional seasonal workers from one or several Member States to another will deeply undermine the ability of growers to harvest fresh produce. This will lead to significant food waste along the supply chain and put supply to European supermarket shelves at risk. Moreover, the replacement of seasonal workers by volunteer staff should be cautiously considered and implemented. Pickers should remain physically capable, trained, fully committed and incentivized to work throughout the season and not merely on a 'one off' basis. If this is not ensured huge uncertainty will be created around the capacity of the sector to continuously and uniformly supply fresh produce throughout the season.

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