

## Freshfel Europe urges EU & UK to conclude trade negotiations and speedup dialogue

Freshfel Europe is calling for the EU and the UK to make a last joint effort to conclude negotiations on a comprehensive trade agreement before the end of the year. In addition, Freshfel Europe urges both blocs to speed-up dialogue on technical, trade facilitation and contingency measures to minimise port congestion disruption in January 2021 and beyond. Notably, this includes further clarity about import checks and inland sites, electronic certification and fast-track channels for highly perishable produce.

Freshfel Europe urges EU and UK negotiators to continue efforts to bring about a conclusion of a comprehensive trade and partnership agreement before the end of December, which is key for both EU and UK businesses in the fresh fruit and vegetables sector, as well as for UK consumers. On 1 January 2021, EU fresh fruit and vegetables operators will be increasing their exports outside of the Single Market by 60% as the UK represents approximately 3 million tonnes of EU exports per year. From a UK perspective, EU imports of fresh produce represent 40% of their domestic demand. In the absence of a EU-UK agreement, tariffs of 2 to 16% will be imposed in the main EU categories exported to the UK.

This additional cost, particularly for commodities with high duties like peaches (16%), clementines and mandarins (16%), grapes (14%), cucumber and other vegetables (12%), may have a devastating economic impact for operators, and lead to strong disturbances in the Single Market if produce stays in the EU-27 instead of reaching the UK market. In turn, this could lead to lesser availability and higher prices in the UK.

Commenting on the need for a last joint effort to conclude negotiations, Freshfel Europe General Delegate Philippe Binard emphasised that, "There is an urgent need for clarity in technical, trade facilitation and contingency measures to ensure trade

flows continue without major disruptions after 1 January 2021. Fruit and vegetables are a highly perishable essential commodity and they must be able to continue to reach UK consumers in a timely manner and with the same level of high quality”.

Currently, the sector is extremely concerned that many details remain unknown, such as the number of UK inland sites foreseen, the percentages of UK checks different commodities will be subject to, and the potential solutions for electronic transmission of phytosanitary and other certification between the EU and the UK. Clarity in these matters is essential, particularly in the current context where points of entry are already showing signs of congestion due to the global impact of COVID-19 in slowing-down trade flows.

To avoid major bottlenecks in UK points of entry and losses in food quality and waste of fresh fruit and vegetables going through the Channel, the sector urges EU and UK authorities to enable a fast-track channel or Green Lanes for highly perishable fresh produce to reach UK consumers.

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