

JOINT DECLARATION

Brussels, 09 April 2025



The Fruit & Vegetable sector holds the answers to the EU's most urgent environmental and societal challenges, but it needs the appropriate support and the right tools

Fresh and preserved Fruit & Vegetables can lead the transition towards a **sustainable food system** and drive the shift in consumer attitudes towards **plant diets** and **healthier eating patterns**.

The fresh and preserved Fruit & Vegetable sectors deliver on all 3 dimensions of sustainability:

Social Sustainability & Health

The cornerstones of the healthy diet needed to address the growing obesity epidemic and increase in non-communicable diseases, Fruit & Vegetables are high in dietary fibre and water, are a good source of micronutrients, including vitamins and minerals, and possess antioxidant properties.

Environmental Sustainability

Fruit & Vegetables have one of the lowest water requirements and lowest CO₂ footprints per Kg of production of any food. With carbon sequestration capacity, they are an essential contributor to the net zero ambition. They support and rely upon biodiversity and are grown with the lowest and responsible use of Plant Protection Products (PPPs).

Economic Sustainability & Food Security

The sector is a major contributor to agricultural employment, and to building vibrant local rural economies that play a crucial role in the EU's food security.

WHAT'S HOLDING US BACK?

Consumption

At 350g/day/capita, the EU average consumption of Fruit & Vegetables is still well below the 400g minimum daily level recommended by the WHO and falls dramatically short of new guidelines which recommend 800g¹ to cover both health (400 g) and environmental benefits.

Production

10 years of major weather events, increased production costs, shortage of labour, regulatory uncertainty and the lack of crucial production tools have taken their toll.

European Fruit & Vegetable crop yields and farmers' incomes have been in decline for a decade, jeopardising the livelihoods of the next generation of European farmers.

A global imbalance exists between recommended consumption and current Fruit & Vegetable production.

If EU consumers were to increase their daily intake of Fruit & Vegetables by one portion/person/day, it would require 12 million tons of additional annual production, which would be challenging against the current background of spiralling costs and declining yields, without concrete action to counter this.

HOW TO SECURE THE PRODUCTION OF THE EU'S FRUIT & VEGETABLES

General Policy recommendations

Policy makers must create an enabling and proportionate legislative framework that provides consistency for investments, avoids unnecessary bureaucratic burdens, ensures coherence across policies, and:

- Supports growers to be market-driven.
- Makes the sector attractive to the next generation to grow Fruit & Vegetables.
- Considers the whole supply chain and competitiveness of other actors for the initiatives to strengthen the role of farmers in the supply chain.
- Supports research, innovation and investments to future-proof an EU-based sector, and secures European leadership on capacity and innovation for Fruit & Vegetables (patents etc), precision farming and alternative approaches, to keep or build excellence and leadership.
- Provides regulatory certainty, workable timescales and science-based legislation built on thorough impact assessments, and the availability of alternatives.
- Secures positive discrimination in policy making which enhances the position of Fruit & Vegetables.

¹Nordic Council of Ministers, Nordic Nutrition Recommendations (Blomhoff et al., 2023)

Specific Policy Recommendations

EU and Member State policies must recognise the specific needs and challenges of the Fruit & Vegetable sector and must deliver on Climate Change Adaptation and socioeconomic challenges, namely:

- Addressing farm labour shortages with flexible migration legislation which facilitates the timely harvest of Fruit & Vegetables.
- Minimising the impact of climate change with a coordinated European strategy that drives urgently needed investment in water storage, irrigation, flood prevention, plant protection and research. Priority should be given to Fruit & Vegetables as an essential sector, for example in times of drought.
- Ensuring that Fruit & Vegetable growers have a complete and effective toolbox of conventional, bio-control PPPs and innovative solutions (see Appendix 1). Revision of the legislative framework is needed to ensure that crucial production tools are available in all EU Member States to address the increased climate-related migration of pests and diseases and create a level playing field whilst coping with prevention of food losses and food waste.

RECOGNITION OF THE IMPERATIVE TO INCREASE CONSUMPTION OF FRUIT & VEGETABLES

Recognition that:

- Fruit & Vegetables must play a crucial role in the transition towards healthier plant diets.
- Fruit & Vegetables are essential and should be considered as public goods.
- The consumption of Fruit & Vegetables across the EU must increase.
- The direct and indirect cost of inaction will be huge for society and for the planet.

Policy Recommendations:

- **DEFINE** healthy diets and SET nutritional recommendations (guidelines already exist) for both consumers and health professionals to increase Fruit & Vegetable consumption.
- **IMPROVE** consumers' access to Fruit & Vegetables.
- **INVESTMENT** in Education & Promotion:
 - **EDUCATE** children and millennials on the benefits of Fruit & Vegetables in a healthy diet with nutritional curricula in schools.
 - **EXPAND** School Fruit Scheme ("one day a week does not change attitudes").
 - **SUPPORT** the Fruit & Vegetable sector with efficient information, promotion and marketing.
- **INCREASE BUDGET:** (*not a call for subsidies*), Today's 2-3% of AGRI budget benefiting Fruit & Vegetables does NOT reflect the leading role the sector should play (marketing value is 15-18% of agricultural output). More budget is needed!
- **USE** economic and fiscal tools to incentivise healthier food environments & healthier choices.



CALL TO POLICY MAKERS

We invite policy makers to further engage with Freshfel Europe and PROFEL to explore how fresh and preserved Fruit & Vegetables can lead the transition towards more sustainable food systems and a healthier diet for EU citizens, and to secure a more prominent position for Fruit and Vegetables in the EC's Vision for Agriculture and Food (see Appendix 2), considering their potential to address environmental and societal challenges.

Appendix 1

Ensuring that Fruit & Vegetable farmers and growers have a complete and effective toolbox to protect their crops from pests and diseases:

Key to securing crop protection will be the halting the withdrawal of essential Plant Protection Products (PPPs) before appropriate replacements are authorised and proven to be effective and affordable. The spectacular rate of decline of active substances in recent years has been aggravated by a significant increase in climate-related pest and disease pressure and further compounded by the alarmingly slow authorisation process for new crop protection tools.

When it comes to Fruit & Vegetables, whilst the diversity of the wide range of produce grown across each Member State provides variation in diet and supports food security, this same richness of relatively small areas of different Fruit & Vegetable crops in each country works against itself when it comes to the regulatory framework and authorising pesticide use. Many 'Minor Use' Fruit & Vegetable crops fail to secure the investment required from Agri-Chemical companies to achieve the national authorisation of a given active substance on the given crop. Furthermore, the zonal system of authorisation simply does not work, and the lack of a joined-up approach means that today an increasing number of farmers across the EU are being exposed to an unacceptable risk of crop failure, with their Fruit & Vegetable crops being threatened significantly by a lack of effective protection from inundation from pests and diseases.

Appendix 2

The Fruit & Vegetable sectors' observations on the Strategic Dialogue and the EC's Vision for Agriculture and Food

The Strategic Dialogue on the Future of EU Agriculture cited the integration of environmental sustainability and health outcomes and provided a direction that was generally positive for the Fruit & Vegetable sector, which included:

- *"Making the healthy and sustainable choice the easy one".*
- *"... rebalancing towards plant-based options and helping consumers to embrace the transition."*
- *"Improving dietary habits is necessary for consumer's own well-being, for reasons of public health protection as well as for the benefit of the climate, the environment, animal welfare, and overall resilience of the agri-food system. Improved consumption patterns can send strong market signals in favour of sustainable production patterns in agriculture..."*
- *"Empowering consumers: To this end, the Commission and Member States should adopt demand-side policies, which address the whole food system, to create enabling food environments where balanced, sustainable healthy diets are available, accessible, affordable, and attractive."*
- *"The EU and Member States should ensure coherence between its agri-food promotion policy and other policy objectives such as healthy eating guidelines and sustainability objectives."*

The EC's Vision for Agriculture and Food, however, does not appear to carry the same positive message for Fruit & Vegetables. Whilst it recognises and accommodates the vulnerabilities of the protein sector, it does not mention Fruit & Vegetables, nor does it carry over the discussion on healthy diets from the Strategic Dialogue report, with diet only mentioned in the briefest of terms.

The "Vision" understandably focuses on farming and food production as an activity; however, the European Commission appears to be missing an opportunity by not considering the very reason behind the activity: that of **creating nutritious food for European consumers.**