



By Carl Collen

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Sector needs "urgent" financial assistance

Coronavirus pandemic has destabilised the industry and threatens long-term food supply, Freshfel has warned



Despite providing an uninterrupted supply of fresh fruit and vegetables so far to European citizens confined at home, the Covid-19 pandemic has continued to destabilise the European fresh fruit and vegetable sector, threatening long-term food supply.

That is the verdict of industry association Freshfel, which sent a letter last week to European commissioner for agriculture Janusz Wojciechowski requesting urgent financial assistance and flexibility in CAP tools to provide "much needed stability" to the fresh fruit and vegetable sector.

Currently, growers are grappling with significant cost increases estimated to be at least €500m per month. The sector has also lost access to the food service sector representing 25-30 per cent of the market supply and EU fresh fruit and vegetables exports to third countries worth €5bn per year are also confronted with significant difficulties.

As the pandemic evolves, it will continue to bring with it further economic stress for the sector and threaten the financial sustainability of fresh fruit and vegetable supply, Freshfel outlined.

Freshfel Europe's letter to Wojciechowski warned that the European fresh fruit and vegetable sector cannot sustain the increased level of production and logistic costs resulting from the Covid-19 crisis without endangering fresh fruit and vegetable supply in the long term.

Financial support is therefore essential in conjunction with other measures, such as flexibility in management of CAP tools, to allow the sector to continue balancing additional costs related to Covid-19 with economic sustainability.

"Added costs in orchards and packing houses are estimated at least €0.05 cts/kg and a similar amount of €0.05 cts/kg is also to be considered to be added as

extra charge in intra EU transport," explained Freshfel general delegate Philippe Binard. Collectively this represents about €500m given the volume produced and shipped monthly.

Binard also highlighted that the sector should be considered an essential sector to secure access to protective tools and measures that would enable the return to normal operating conditions as early as possible.

This would include access to hydrogel, masks and testing and allow the sector to be in a position to remove social distancing measures.

With the availability of all seasonal workers these changes would facilitate orchard activities and logistics operations to run at normal high efficiency rates to ensure supply, Freshfel said.

As the pandemic continues to unfold Freshfel Europe maintained that further

necessary measures under the CAP must be

to commissioner Wojciechowski that in

Evolving conditions in regard to insurance

<http://www.fruitnet.com/americafruit/article/1474/parts-of-san-diego-quarantined-as-psyllid-count-mounts>

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taken at European level to avoid a food supply crisis later in the year and ensure that the sector can continue to provide Europe's supply of fresh fruit and vegetables at affordable prices to consumers in the coming months.

Freshfel also recommended

light of the far reaching implications of the crisis to also review different policies connected to agriculture and fruit and vegetables specifically, such as research and innovation, organic reform, promotion policy, international trade policy and the forthcoming Farm to Fork Strategy.

and credit insurance and equal access to liquidity should also be analysed, the association concluded.

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