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By Carl  
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## Sector shows resilience in face of Covid-19



Philippe Binard

Freshfel's Philippe Binard highlighted the resilience of the industry in the face of many challenges brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic

**F**reshfel Europe general delegate Philippe Binard has used a dedicated public hearing in the European Parliament to highlight the resilience of the fresh fruit and vegetable sector in the face of the many socio-economic challenges brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Binard told yesterday's (26 October) hearing that, throughout the pandemic so far, the sector had faced multifaceted socio-economic difficulties such as border closures, panic buying, seasonal worker availability complexities and foodservice closures.

Despite this and without fail, the fresh produce business had continually adapted to provide high quality fresh produce to European consumers, he said.

Speaking at the European Parliament's committee on agriculture and rural development public hearing on 'Fruits,

vegetables and wine market situation – the impact of the EU measures to face the Covid-19 pandemic', Binard presented the socio-economic challenges for the fruit and vegetable sector created by the pandemic.

He highlighted that the sector had shown "tremendous resilience" and had taken steps to quickly adapt to the pandemic conditions including responding to panic buying, adapting supply and securing product diversity, adjusting to new consumer requirements, redirecting specific product segments as a result of foodservice closures and repositioning sales through e-commerce.

Binard thanked the European Institutions for their initial response in supporting business, however stressed that business continuity should not be taken for granted.

"Freshfel Europe's May Covid-19 Impact

Assessment identified that adjusting to challenges across the supply chain resulted in an estimated added cost for the sector of at least €500m per month," he outlined. "This excludes loss from the foodservice stage in the chain from which sales represent 15-25 per cent of the total fruit and vegetable market as well as costs at retail level which were felt by all sectors."

While consumer value of fruit and vegetables as a key nutritional element of a healthy diet has been boosted by the pandemic, Binard warned policy-makers of the new and continued socio-economic challenges already hitting the sector in the current second wave.

He outlined that mounting pressure on prices due to the impending economic crisis, continued additional costs in the supply chain, the need to quickly re-direct produce to other market channels due to restrictions on foodservices, shortages of seasonal workers and

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maintaining trade opportunities would prevail over the coming months, all in the shadow of Brexit, which would bring its own costs and constraints.

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