

Freshfel Europe urges facilitation of trade

By [Tom Joyce](#) 23 March 2023

The European fresh produce association called for the WTO to ensure the current functioning of phytosanitary agreements before seeking to broaden their scope

At a dedicated session on sustainable food systems hosted by the World Trade Organisation's SPS (Sanitary and Phytosanitary) Committee, Freshfel Europe stressed the important role played by the fruit and vegetables sector in contributing to environmentally, socially and economically sustainable food systems.

The association highlighted the need for the WTO to "first and foremost improve the current functioning of the SPS agreement for market access" and underlined the importance of "global governance to ensure transparent and undisrupted trade flows".

"Freshfel Europe was invited to reflect on how to facilitate global food security and more sustainable food systems, without putting trade at risk under emerging modern SPS challenges," Freshfel Europe stated.

General delegate Philippe Binard offered the perspective of the European fresh produce sector on those emerging modern SPS challenges, as well as urging continued efforts to secure the effective application of the current SPS agreement to facilitate international trade.

"Fruit and vegetables are essential goods given their low environmental impact and high health benefits," said Binard. "They are also part of the solutions to climate change and a range of socio-economic challenges. They are an important driver of economic growth and act as a preventative measure for certain non-communicable diseases. As such, fresh produce is essential for the success of EU strategies such as the Green Deal, Farm to Fork or the EU beating cancer plan."

Freshfel Europe's Philippe Binard Binard said the WTO had to do more to ensure members adhered to the principles of the SPS and Trade Facilitation Agreements before looking to broaden the scope of competence of the SPS agreement.



"Although a clear definition of a sustainable food system is still not available, the fresh produce sector started its journey towards environmental, economic and social sustainability more than 20 years ago to respond to societal concerns and customer demand," he said. "This was done through clear steps such as innovative agricultural practices and precision farming, GAP certification and IPM techniques, private standards limiting PPP use and closely monitoring MRLs, and new guarantees regarding labour protection."

According to Freshfel Europe, the position of fresh produce should be reinforced in all policies and its international trade facilitated in order to boost sustainability. Global governance was needed to address international challenges like climate change and issues relating to environmental sustainability such as water scarcity, biodiversity or soil protection, it stated.

“Sustainability should be enhanced by private and public governance to coordinate international standards, provide transparency and notification of rules, enhance best practices, assist developing countries to cope with new requirements and address market access challenges and growing protectionism through SPS barriers,” Binard said.

“To ensure a well-functioning trade environment that supports sustainable food systems, policy coherence and transparency are essential, as well as the removal of undue SPS barriers creating trade distortions and delays,” Freshfel Europe concluded. “Fruit and vegetables are global, essential goods, and should be positioned as such in the journey towards a more sustainable food and trade system.”