



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

30th October 2008

FRESHFEL EUROPE CONDEMNS RUSSIAN PLANS TO INTRODUCE SAFETY CERTIFICATES FOR SELECTED FRESH PRODUCE ORIGINATING IN THE EU

Freshfel Europe is alarmed by the information that the Russian Federal Service for Veterinary and Phytosanitary Surveillance (Rosselkhozadzor) will require as of 1st November safety certificates for several products originating in the EU. Freshfel regrets this move which takes place at the moment when Russia and the EU agreed to hold technical discussions on Maximum Residue Level (MRL) setting to align Russian rules to international practices. This decision is also contradictory to the outcome of bilateral discussions held by Russia with the authorities of several Member States.

According to Rosselkhozadzor, a safety certificate will be required as of 1st November for the following products and origins: Greece (kiwifruits, peaches, lemons, oranges and mandarins), Spain (carrots, mandarins, grapefruits, salads and oranges), Lithuania (red beets, carrots, cabbages, eggplants, apples, peaches, nectarines, mandarins, salads, sweet cherries, grapes, strawberries and tomatoes), The Netherlands (tomatoes, apples, carrots, red beets and cabbages), Hungary (sweet cherries, cherries, strawberries, cabbages and tomatoes) and Italy (peaches, nectarines, melons and grapes).

This measure is putting in jeopardy the exports of EU quality produce which today amount to close to 1.3 million tonnes. EU fruit and vegetables are grown according to strict EU safety and environmental requirements and the proposed measures threaten to prevent Russian consumers from a wide range of EU quality produce. Freshfel would like to highlight that the current developments are resulting from inadequate MRLs set by the Russian legislation which are not in line with international practices set by CODEX. Freshfel laments the move from Russia, as at a recent meeting between the EU and Russia it was agreed to further discuss the inadequacy of the Russian MRL with a view to bringing them into line with international best practices.

Freshfel further criticises the short term of implementation of the measures, not allowing exporters adequate time to cope with the new requirements. This is likely therefore to lead to the severe disruption of trade flows and will hinder current arrangements between suppliers and Russian importers. Furthermore, the framework of operation of the safety certificate is not clear as long as discrepancies of interpretation between the EU and Russia exist over the terms of the Memorandum. It also remains unclear on which basis laboratory analysis should be undertaken. Freshfel is committed to work with the European Commission to clarify this point and to propose to Russia alternative MRLs compatible with the terms of the Memorandum.

The measures implemented by Russia impose a burden across the whole sector on the basis of limited and questionable problems, and Freshfel considers these measures to be excessive and lacking in proportionality. On the contrary, the new measures mean that Russian consumers will be deprived from EU quality produce by a situation which does not place the health of Russian consumers at risk.

European exporters are used to comply with strict safety standards, and are ready to adjust their practices in order to cope with specific customer requirements demanded by the market as long as these requirements are workable, reasonable and consistent with international trade policy. The move by Russia is a negative development at a moment where Russia is in negotiations to join the WTO.

Note to the Editors: Freshfel Europe is the European Fresh Produce Association, representing the interests of importers, exporters, wholesalers and distributors, and retailers of fresh fruits and vegetables in Europe and beyond. Freshfel Europe currently has over 200 members, including both companies and associations. For more information, contact the association at info@freshfel.org or visit the association website www.freshfel.org.