



## Public consultation on the revision of European Union marketing standards for agricultural products

AREFLH (Assemblée des Régions Européennes Fruitières Légumières et Horticoles) welcomes the European Commission's move to greener programming across for the 2021 – 2027 period, and this is no exception for the agriculture sector. AREFLH also agrees that the Commission's marketing standards as defined by 1308/2013 and the relevant Common Market Organisation (CMO) regulation have contributed to the success of Europe's fruit and vegetable sector in reaching new markets and valorising a greater variety of products within the market. The current public consultation to revise the EU marketing standards emphasises the need to modify standards to better incorporate sustainability is understandable considering the overall policy priorities but presents a series of challenges that must be addressed, and the current conditions do not make this possible.

### Defining sustainability

Firstly, a measure of sustainability is difficult to achieve without a standardised definition. At present, sustainable production can be interpreted differently according to individual producers and national-level legislation, with varying emphasis on energy efficiency, water efficiency, social sustainability (fair trade production, living wages for concerned workers, etc.). Although a series of labels exist to certify certain sustainable practices, the process by which these are obtained by individual producers are rarely standardised, with each producer reaching the required benchmarks for recognition through processes most relevant to their crop. For this reason, an overarching measure of sustainability needs to be established first so that sustainability as a concept may be further integrated in the EU's marketing standards. So far, the only sustainability-related label designed for use across the EU that can be utilised in a marketing capacity in the fruit and vegetables sector is the organic label, precisely because there are clear criteria that an organic product must satisfy to obtain this certification. In this regard, integrated production is a production method that the European Commission has recognised as incorporating sustainable practice, and already monitors its implementation. If the implementation can be translated into empirically measured criteria, a label for agri-food products derived from integrated production methods could be used as an indicator of sustainability within product marketing.

### Implementation issues

In relation to this, any measures of sustainability would need to be applied equally across Member States. Currently, certain national – level legislation is being introduced (such as the ban on plastic packaging on most fruit and vegetable products that will come into force in France on 1 January 2022) that would create distortions within the single market should other countries not introduce parallel legislation. This is to say, national-level moves aimed at improving sustainability should be incorporated into a wider European regulatory definition that

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prevents imbalances between measures among producers and Member States that would provide some with unfair advantages due to enacting fewer sustainability-related measures and their connected costs.

However, should such measures be introduced, it would present additional costs for producers who would require their products to be checked and audited for correct implementation. This is a time-consuming exercise would entail additional costs for producers that at present they do not have a way to refund. A clear indication of the desire to avoid such additional costs at the national as well is that neither the EU nor individual Member States have chosen to adopt privately-devised standards such as GlobalGAP.

Additionally, in certain instances, adding additional labelling for the purpose of demonstrating sustainability would be highly impractical. For example, in the case of pre-cut fruit, this is a question of labelling fruit that often comes from a variety of countries with different production methods and potentially standards, which in turn makes defining such a confection as sustainable or otherwise difficult.

### **Ensure standards serve their intended purpose**

The AREFLH position aligns itself with the second option outlined by the impact assessment, phrased as *“Do not revise the substance of the current marketing standards but align the existing legislation with the procedural requirements of the Lisbon Treaty.”* The EU’s marketing standards in their present form serve their intended purpose, which is establish product specifications that agricultural goods in the EU must satisfy to make it to market. As the situation currently stands, there is no practical way of incorporating a clear overarching measure of sustainability in the marketing standards. Devising unified sustainability standards within marketing for products requiring different resources and growing methods would involve highly general indicators that would not guarantee substantial sustainability gains. The Common Agricultural Policy has existing funding and programmes that better address the question of sustainability in food production, distribution, and consumption. The fruit and vegetables CMO has successfully incorporated sustainable practices and can be considered a leader in this sense.

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