

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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EUFRUIT thematic network kick-off in Brussels: A multi-layered project to unleash, stimulate and use European research potential for exploiting new opportunities in the fresh produce category

On 3-4 March 2016, the kick off meeting of EUFRUIT took place in Brussels with the ambitious goal of fully exploiting the European research potential. EUFRUIT is a Horizon 2020 European funded project aiming at facilitating the access to knowledge and at disseminating existing research and innovation potential for the benefit of the fresh produce sector and consumers.

EUFRUIT is setting up a unique thematic European Fruit Network where research institutes and the European representative organizations of the fresh fruit sector are joining forces. Altogether, EUFRUIT gathers a consortium of 21 partners from 12 different countries. The consortium will focus its activities on 4 crucial thematic areas for the competitiveness and innovation potential of the European Fruit sector. These areas include 1) new cultivar development, 2) minimise residues on fruit and in the environment, 3) optimise storage and fruit quality as well as 4) enhance sustainable production systems. As such, EUFRUIT will act as a knowledge platform while providing unique networking opportunities for academics and researchers partners, fruit business operators as well as decision makers.

EUFRUIT will be a dedicated platform to secure that existing research are fully exploited by the fruit sector, maximizing the research investment into effective exchange of best practices and converting knowledge into innovative agriculture practices across Europe. From the fresh produce sector, both AREFLH (Association of the Regions producing fruit, vegetables and horticulture products) and Freshfel Europe (European fruit and vegetables Association) will be actively involved in the dissemination of the project achievements to the sector.

EUFRUIT is coordinated by Michelle Williams, Head of the Department of Food Science, Aarhus University, Denmark and current chair of the Board of EUFRIN, an informal network of university departments and research institutes for temperate fruit crops. After the meeting, Michelle Williams stated: *"I am very pleased that the project managed to gather so many different and experienced partners and successfully received the support of the European Commission. EUFRUIT will fill an important gap by enhancing research cooperation across Europe and will foster exchange of knowledge for the benefit of the fruit sector. In the project we are committed to build an efficient instrument to enhance the competitiveness of a very important segment of the agricultural economy of the European Union"*.

AREFLH

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With a total budget of 1.8 million €, the network will establish in the upcoming three years a systematic approach for knowledge gathering and dissemination. This will be facilitated by harmonizing methodologies for the scanning and synthesis of knowledge, and foster exchange of best practises and technologies reviewed by international experts in the 4 priorities areas of the thematic network. It will importantly secure a direct path for new knowledge and reduce the likelihood of repetition of research at a national level.

Both Jacques Dasque (Secretary General of AREFLH) and Philippe Binard (General Delegate of Freshfel Europe) welcomed the launch of the project: *“EUFRUIT is promising to be an important tool for the fruit sector with ready access to up-to-date information on research to stimulate competitiveness, sustainability, quality and safety of fruit for the benefit of the supply chain and ultimately the consumers”*. Jointly with the other partners in the project AREFLH and Freshfel Europe will regularly update the sector on the progress of the work. The websites of EUFRIN (www.eufrin.org), AREFLH (www.areflh.org) and Freshfel Europe (www.freshfel.org) will provide regular update on the project developments.

The EUFRUIT project launched on 3-4 March is a concrete result of the efforts of AREFLH and Freshfel Europe in collaboration with EUFRIN to bring together the fruit sector and their research institutes. Since January 2014, a Task Force with the three entities was set up, leading to the release in March 2015 of a Strategic Innovation and Research Agenda (SIRA) to better position fruit and vegetables in the European Union research and innovation priorities within the Horizon 2020. Priorities set by the SIRA were upheld by the European annual work plan of the European Commission under the Horizon 2020 and greatly facilitated the positioning of EUFRUIT as a priority project.

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Note to the Editors:

AREFLH gathers 21 European regions producing fruit and vegetables and their producers' organisations. They account for 40% of the European production of fruit and vegetables. For more informations: www.areflh.org

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CENTRO DI SPERIMENTAZIONE AGRARIA E FORESTALE LAIMBURG AZIENDA (ITALY)

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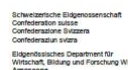
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