



PRESS RELEASE

AREFLH General Assembly: a day of reflection on the challenges and prospects for agriculture in Europe

As part of its General Assembly meeting, AREFLH (the Assembly of Horticultural Regions) organised a public conference in Central Macedonia to discuss the changes underway in Europe regarding the CAP and the new strategic horizon for the agricultural sector.

Three representatives from the host region opened the event. Georgios Kefalas, Vice-Governor, and Bane Prelevic, Vice-Governor for External Relations, spoke of the "need for exchange and discussion to build the future of the sector in our regions". Katerina Zografou, Vice-Governor of the regional unit of Chalkidiki, stressed that in this troubled context, "organisations like AREFLH are more important than ever to enable farmers to speak with one voice with the European institutions".

The first part of the conference was devoted to the challenges facing European producers. Luc Berlottier from the European Commission's DG AGRI also presented a progress report on sectoral intervention in the fruit and vegetable sector. He highlighted the trend towards a greater concentration of European production in a decreasing number of producer organisations.

His intervention initiated a discussion with the participants to clarify and better understand the Commission's position.

The first round table, consisting of six European experts in agricultural production, outlined the background to the strategic dialogue launched by the Commission: the forthcoming elections, protests across Europe, climate change and new market regulations. The speakers emphasised the need for transition periods for farmers, as well as realistic policies on the part of the relevant institutions.

The speakers also called on the sector to be proactive in the face of climate change, pointing out that the changes in society's attitudes to food and the sustainability of food products cannot be ignored.

The session concluded with the need to communicate more effectively on the environmental practices already implemented by producers in order to counter misconceptions of agriculture as a polluting sector. These have led to a severe polarisation of the debate around agriculture.

The second major theme of the public conference, held on the eve of the International Water Day (22 March), was the management of this vital resource. The speakers presented their current projects and actions to preserve water in European territories.

The representatives of the regions of Valencia (Spain) and Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes (France) detailed their support for producers in their efforts to use water sparingly, thanks to irrigation

robotics and constant attention to farmers' needs. Simona Caselli, President of AREFLH, declared that "we need to plan the use of water and invest in the modernisation of infrastructures as well as in operational programmes". The subject will be taken up again in the coming months in the AREFLH water working group.

Finally, Simona Caselli closed the day by announcing that the next Annual General Meeting will be held in March 2025 in the Spanish region of Valencia.

The replay of the public conference will be posted on the AREFLH YouTube channel in a few days, and all the presentations can be sent on request.

PHOTO: from left to right, François Lafitte (President of APFeLSO), Richard Schouten, (Director of DPA), Cristian Maretti (Vice-President of Gruppo VI.VA), Elli Tisforou (President of the Cooperative Coordination Committee at COGECA), Christos Giannakakis (Vice-President of the National Union of Agrarian Cooperatives of Greece) and Simona Caselli (President of AREFLH).



The mission of AREFLH, the Assembly of European Horticultural Regions, is to :

- Represent its members : 17 regions and 41 POs/APOs and associate members from 13 European countries,
- Defend the economic and social interests of the fruit, vegetable and flower sectors in dealings with European bodies,
- Encourage exchanges of experience, partnerships and joint projects between regions and professional organisations,
- To be a driving force behind proposals on the main issues affecting the future of fruit and vegetable production in Europe.

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