



The AREFLH Annual Forum: a successful opportunity for dialogue between the European institutions and the fruit and vegetable sector

At this strategic time, the AREFLH is closing today in Brussels its event devoted to agricultural policy in the new European legislature.

Today, the Assembly of European Fruit, Vegetable, and Horticultural Regions (AREFLH) marked a new stage with its Annual Forum. The first edition was crowned by a high level of participation from producer organisations and horticultural regions, enabling a constructive exchange with numerous representatives of European institutions.

The event began with a moment of silence to pay tribute to the climate disaster victims that struck the Valencia community, which will be hosting the AREFLH General Meeting next April.

The conference then turned to the theme of the **Strategic Dialogue** report. Guest MEPs Carmen Crespo Díaz, Dario Nardella, Herbert Dorfmann, and Valérie Hayer all agreed that we were entering a 'new era,' one in which the Parliament would place 'all the players around the table, to have a global approach and a sense of compromise.' Ricard Ramon of the European Commission announced that the guidelines in the Strategic Dialogue report would result in a vision for agriculture to be published before the end of February 2025.

In the second part, the focus was on the CMO **and sectoral aid for fruit and vegetables**, the discussion focused on producers' views on risk management, mutual funds, and innovation. In response to the challenges put forward by producers (Afrucat, VBT, FINAF), Dan Burgar Kuželički explained that DG Agri is already considering changing some of the existing tools for the next CAP. On this subject, AREFLH President Simona Caselli stressed that 'it is essential to strengthen the grouping of producers and maintain a specific budget for fruit and vegetables.'

In the third part of the conference, on the theme of **sustainability**, Gregorio Dávila Díaz from the European Commission (DG Agri) presented a **new strategy for water resilience**. Pedro Narro and Manuel Gómez Galera, representing the regions, illustrated, respectively, the infrastructure needs of the territories and the experience of local management of the new CAP.

Finally, the discussion focused on the **legislative proposal on packaging waste** with MEP Mariateresa Vivaldini and representatives of both the producers and the packaging industry (IDfel Val de Loire, Groentenfruit Huis, Pro Food). Everyone was able to express the proposal's impact on the sector and the absolute need for a single list of exceptions that will not disrupt the European market.

Simona Caselli said that this first edition of the Annual Forum revealed the '**specific nature of the AREFLH, this union of regions and producers** working together to build a bridge between farmers and the European institutions'.

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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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