

- CELCAA online Conference – 10 March 2021 – EU Trade Policy – What ambitions for the EU agri-food trade?
- **Closing remarks by president Marcel van der Vliet**
- Thank you Rose, for the kind introduction.
- As president of CELCAA, I would like to thank Executive Vice President Dombrovskis, Minister do Ceu Autunes, Commissioner Wojciechowski, Mr. Teroro, Mr Schlegelmilch and all speakers from the trade for today's lively discussion.
- Rose thank you also for your role as moderator - in these challenging times of ONLINE – conferencing you did a fantastic job!
- It's my pleasure to give you a few final messages and concluding remarks:
- From today's discussions one thing is clear: the EU is on a journey to make agri-food systems and trade even more sustainable.
- We support the ambitions of the European Commission, because we care about our environment, our future, our business, which depends on the long term sustainability of the complete agri-food chain.
- It's as simple at this: "No farmers, no trade, no industry, no food".
- Our European and global agri-food chain can only thrive if a continuous and sufficient supply of crop, commodities, products and ingredients are guaranteed, supplied by farmers and growers that are able to earn a good living, obviously based on responsible soil and farm management, as this is in their well-understood self-interest!

- Traders not only care about an EU food and agri policy that ensures sufficient volume of produce and products, we also have a sharp eye on sourcing and supplying the right quality of products, at the right price!
- Only together can we deal with the many challenges that lie in front of us: challenges relating to weather, climate, our natural environment, our health and not to forget: the socio-economic and business reality post COVID.
- The Farm to Fork strategy and the EU trade policy reflect those challenges and draft a vision for the future.
- Both strategies potentially have a significant impact on how food and agro-supplies are produced in the EU, how much and what we import and export as EU producers, processors and traders.
- Hence, EU agri-trade policy will impact the role of the EU as a global leader in agri-food. Obviously, we, as trade association, support an ambitious policy framework, a supportive framework, that enables us to stay in the lead, to create value for the chain, from farm to fork. We like to do business, now and in the future, so we keep caring about the interests of both our suppliers and our customers.
- There are 27 actions listed in the annex of the Farm To Fork Strategy.
- Let me say few words on these.
 - 1) We think the EU should acknowledge the continuous efforts made by the EU farming community to raise standards of production- be it on animal welfare or the reduction of entrants or antibiotics.
 - 2) Sustainable production is not only organic or local production - there are many ways to reduce the carbon footprint of food production and consumption and this should also be recognized.
 - 3) As mentioned by the representatives of the wine, dairy and meat and livestock trade today, agri-food trade contributes in many ways to the sustainability goals that we strive for, as it guarantees the best possible valorization of crops and agri-foods, be they of vegetable or animal origin.
 - 4) Trade helps to reduce waste by distinguishing products and parts that are fit for human consumption, for animal feed or for technical or pharmaceutical applications. By diversifying

outlets and sources, by the grading of qualities, trade supports the optimal allocation of products.

- 5) Another important remark I'd like to make: there is no such thing as good or bad food; our extraordinary culinary diversity and wealth is praised by consumers in the EU and worldwide. The promotion policy and its future revision should continue to embrace the goal to make our products and their way of production known to consumers, here on the internal market and beyond EU borders.
- Let me be clear here: there should be no exclusion of products from the current scope of the promotion policy.
- 6) Trade is a vehicle to support the overall sustainability agenda and the promotion of the EU's standards and values. All recent concluded FTAs include comprehensive sustainability & development chapters, which can and should be further developed.
- 7) The EU as a major trading bloc, representing an internal market with more than 446 million citizens can also use its leverage to promote more sustainability in international standards. The saying goes: "Tell me what you eat and drink, and I tell you who you are" – so, let us trade the agri-food products and commodities that these 446 million people from the EU are so proud of. By doing so, each trade helps to promote the quality standards that are behind our crops, ingredients and final products.
- 8) The Covid-19 pandemic shown that the EU agri-food system is resilient to crisis and trade has played its crucial role to guarantee food security, both within the EU as well as outside the EU. There was no shortage of food during the pandemic, at least not within the EU. Today we also learned once more that this cannot be taken for granted and is not a given for all human beings. So, it is our conviction that as long as borders remain open, essential workers can travel and trade can flow, there will be no shortage of food, nor will there be a reduction of the complete offering of quality food and drinks that we are used to.
- 9) In this respect we also call upon the EU to work on a coordinated reopening of the HORECA and safe and secure restart of the travel, tourism, conference and trade-fair industry, so that agri-food traders can go out again to meet suppliers and customers, find new markets, sources and customers for agri-food products and commodities, work on innovation, research and development projects. This will also contribute to the earlier mentioned optimal, often higher valorization of agri-food products through the food service and out-of-home sales channels.
- 10) A smoothly functioning of global agri-food trade is the world's best assurance against problematic food inflation and social unrest, it's simple as that. Please do not underestimate the importance of the EU food and agri trade to help feed the growing urban populations of this world, as referred to by Mr. Torero Cullen of the FAO.
- However, we do hear new calls for protectionism, some very open and loud, other more hidden, both from within the EU as from the side of our international trading partners. We

cannot reiterate enough, that protectionist measures will only lead to increasing cost of transactions, of doing business, as they add delays, red tape and additional costs to the free and competitive flow of goods and execution of trade related services.

- Today's reality is that the EU is an integral part of a global system of production and exchange. This global system is complementary to local and regional supply chains. They go hand in hand. Only then can we deliver, for all actors along the chain.
- So, strategic autonomy should help the resilience of the EU and not translate into the raising of trade barriers or create further trade tensions.
- As said by many contributors before me, the supply of food is much more resilient when they come from a variety of geographical sources- compared to a single source of supply. Reducing sources of supply from rest of the world could lead in turn that the rest of the world would seek to reduce its imports from the EU. This would have sincere consequences for our positive trade balance and market returns for all actors along the agri-food chain.
- In that context, we look forward to receiving details on the intention of the Commission on the proposed 'sustainable food system' chapter in FTA's and on the future proposal that imported products shall comply with certain production requirements, whilst remaining WTO compliant.
- Again we believe cooperation and leveraging international standards is the way to go.
- At the same time we welcome the EU drive towards more assertive trade policy, to guarantee a proper implementation of the FTAs. The nomination of the Chief Trade Enforcement Officer is in that respect a very welcomed initiative. We count on practical and swift diplomatic support of the EU and it's member states, in case we run into violations of the FTA's and in case of trade frictions resulting from unfair, discriminatory or unjust health, safety, veterinary requirements and issues, that often appear all of a sudden and completely unnotified.
- More than ever, we need international cooperation. As good traders, we are focused on building bridges between nations, people and cultures, based on strong and predictable rules of the game.
- We want a Union that is leader in supporting open markets while supporting sensitive sectors; a Union that leads international cooperation by raising standards in a collaborative way, an Union that leads on rules-based system .
- The EU internal market is based on these principles and has been the most successful achievement of the EU since World War II. We trust the EU can lead the changes on the international scene based on this excellent track record.

A few final words from my side: I would like to thank the members, the board and all the staff of CELCAA, and specifically our great Secretary General, Mrs. Pascale Rouhier, for their energy and support to make this event happen.

It's great to work with you, let's keep waving the flag for free, fair and long-term trade!

Ladies and gentlemen, on behalf of the EU agri-food traders, many thanks for your participation and the lively debate.