

## PRESS RELEASE

Brussels, September 18, 2020

### **Ahead of the EU's Agriculture and Fisheries Council in Brussels on September 21, the agri-food trade sector calls on ministers to recognise trade as a key element of a resilient food supply chain and provide support to a strong and ambitious trade policy.**

CELCAA, the European Liaison Committee for Agricultural and Agri-Food Trade, says the EU has to step up its efforts in bolstering the food trade sector, which has suffered in recent months during the Covid-19 crisis. The pandemic has disrupted food production and supply chains, with travel bans, lockdown and shutdowns of food services and disruption of transport all combining to undermine trade.

*"The EU needs to ensure that global food supply chains remain open, so agri-food products can keep moving," said Marcel van der Vliet, CELCAA President. "Europe's agricultural and agri-food trade sector is facing challenges, not just from the effects of the coronavirus pandemic, but also because of uncertainties in the global trading system. Only with free and fair trade can we continue to import and export properly. And only with free and fair trade can consumers have continued access to safe, healthy, diversified and nutritious food."*

The EU is the world's leading trader of agri-food products: it is the top exporter (€151.2 billion in 2019) and second-largest importer (€110 billion). However, the measures enacted during the Covid-19 crisis at a global level placed unprecedented stresses on the vital flow of food from farms and producers to consumers. Despite its leading role in the global food trade, the EU is not self-sufficient and cannot take its own food security for granted.

*"Despite the disruptions, food supply chains have demonstrated remarkable resilience. Indeed, trade has played its role during the pandemic and supply chains were able to re-organise to ensure the continued availability of food. The role of the trade as a vital element of a resilient food system must be recognised,"* Marcel van der Vliet continued.

The EU must seek out new markets as a priority of its post-pandemic recovery, to help the diversification of imports and exports. Along with a robust implementation of existing commitments, we need ambitious trade deals in key growth markets to ensure a level playing field with competitors. Recent agreements with Japan, Canada and Vietnam have promoted EU exports, and more agreements should be pursued. CELCAA also supports a positive engagement with the US to avoid any further trade dispute escalation. EU agri-foodstuffs should not be targeted with retaliatory measures in unrelated trade disputes.

We need to draw lessons from the current crisis. The temporary measures put in place during the pandemic, such as the electronic transmission of customs certificates, should be made permanent. We should further develop digital tools in food supply chains to improve efficiency, sustainability and supply chain visibility.

In her State of the Union address on September 16, European Commission President mentioned the importance of free trade, saying, *"We will continue to believe in open and fair trade across the world. Not as an end in itself – but as a way to deliver prosperity at home and promote our values and standards."* Ministers need to reassert these principles of free trade when it comes to building a resilient food system.

**END**

**For further information:**

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