

PPWR: THE FRUIT AND VEGETABLE VALUE CHAIN CALLS FOR SUSTAINABLE, DATA-DRIVEN REGULATION

At the Fruit Logistica panel, organized by ProFood and Freshfel Europe, European and international associations met to discuss packaging regulation (PPWR) urging a pragmatic approach and warning about the risk of fragmentation of the single market

(Berlin, Feb. 7, 2025) - A pragmatic and data-driven approach is what the fruit and vegetable supply chain is calling for to discuss the implications of implementing the **Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation (PPWR)**. The discussion took place during a panel discussion organized by **ProFood** and **Freshfel Europe** at Fruit Logistica 2025 entitled *PPWR Implementation = less sustainability and less internal market? The voice of fresh produce supply chain*.

The panel discussion highlighted critical issues related to an ideological approach that threatens both environmental sustainability and the functioning of the European single market.

The adoption of the **PPWR**, particularly the ban on plastic packaging for fruits and vegetables under 1.5 kg, was the focus of the discussion. According to the experts who spoke, the regulation does not take into account the **specificities of the fruit and vegetable sector**, risking compromising product quality, increasing food waste, and creating distortions in the European single market.

Opening the discussion was **Roberto Zanichelli**, representative of **ProFood**, who pointed out that the supply chain's advocacy is still ongoing and that there is much work to be done to ensure rational implementation of the PPWR. Zanichelli presented the results of the study Fruit and vegetable products and primary packaging: a preliminary study on environmental impact from field to table, carried out by the **Department of Agricultural, Forestry and Food Sciences, University of Turin**.

The study, based on the Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) method, showed that rPET packaging offers better environmental performances than cardboard, not only in terms of CO₂ emissions, land consumption and water resources, but also in reducing food waste along the supply chain.

"You cannot address sustainability without considering the entire product life cycle," Zanichelli stressed. *"Eliminating plastic packaging without concrete alternatives can lead to increased waste and a larger overall environmental footprint."*

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Next, **Joanna Nathanson**, Head of Sustainability and External Relations at **Freshfel Europe**, traced the long process of PPWR and highlighted how its implementation is still uncertain.

“We have seen a change in EU policy: the Green Deal was a very good ambition, but implementation has been lacking,” she explained. She went on to highlight the fruit and vegetable sector's discrimination in packaging, despite the fact that it accounts for only a small percentage of total food packaging. *“We need to ensure harmonization across European markets and regulatory certainty to enable appropriate investment,”* she continued, pointing out the significant cost implications for companies that need to convert production lines from plastic to paper.

Massimiliano Del Core, vice president of **Ortofrutta Italia**, gave a voice to the Italian supply chain. He brought the point of view of fruit and vegetable production and distribution, presenting data collected through questionnaires addressed to product committees.

“This is not a battle between plastic and paper, but the function that packaging plays in product quality and safety,” Del Core explained. *“Without proper packaging, the shelf life of products is drastically reduced, with a significant impact especially for exports. For many product categories, packaging is not just a choice, but a necessity. We represent the entire supply chain, from growers to retailers, and speak with one voice when it comes to packaging.”*

His analysis showed how regulation can impact the entire value chain, from producer to end consumer, requiring a more balanced approach.

Luc Vanoirbeek, chairman of **COPA-COGECA's F&V Working Group**, on the other hand, focused on the exemption lists that each Member State shall publish, pointing out the danger of fragmentation of the European market.

“Each country will have its own exemption list: how long will it take before a solution is found? We are talking about a market that serves 27 Member States: if each country works out its own exemptions, the single market will be undermined,” Vanoirbeek said. *“We will have distorted competition between producers and distributors, with negative effects on the supply chain and the free movement of goods.”* Industry associations are already gearing up to work on exemption lists, trying to make them as broad and homogeneous as possible to reduce the damage to the industry's competitiveness.

Closing the speaking session was **Daniel Duguay**, sustainability specialist at **CPMA (Canadian Produce Marketing Association)**, who shared the Canadian

experience, where the government initially proposed restrictions similar to those of PPWR, but then changed direction.

“In Canada, we have begun to question the supposed theoretical benefits of these measures,” Duguay explained. “Through a data-driven analysis, we showed that the costs far outweighed the benefits, and the government withdrew the proposal. Eliminating plastic packaging without a real sustainable alternative puts food safety and supply chain continuity at risk. The difference is in the approach: we need to talk about packaging functionality, not just material composition.”

The Canadian approach, based on constructive discussion between industry and institutions, shows that it is possible to reconcile environmental sustainability and economic efficiency without penalizing strategic sectors such as fruit and vegetables.

In the final phase of the panel discussion, the role of retailers emerged strongly: packaging is not only a solution for product preservation, but also a strategic element in the management of sales space, merchandise rotation, and product presentation to consumers. Reducing packaging without viable alternatives risks compromising the quality of the offer and generating more waste along the distribution chain.

Finally, the need to educate consumers about the value of packaging emerged. Daniel Duguay pointed out that 90 percent of a package's functions occur before the consumer sees the product on the shelves, contributing to the protection, preservation, and quality of fresh food. Communicating this will be essential to counter the negative perception of packaging and encourage truly sustainable solutions.

The event concluded with a clear message: the fruit and vegetable supply chain will continue to make its voice heard with the European institutions so that the implementation of the PPWR is guided by a more balanced approach, taking into account the specificities of the sector and the available scientific data, in order to avoid negative impacts on sustainability, food security and the competitiveness of the European market.

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