

European fresh produce consumption decreases

By [Carl Collen](#) | 17 April 2024

The latest edition of Freshfel's Consumption Monitor shows that Europe is falling well short of the minimum recommendation of 400g per day/capita of fresh fruit and vegetables

Freshfel Europe has released the latest edition of its European Fresh Produce Consumption Monitor, revealing a drop in fresh produce consumption.

The report provides a comparison of consumption trends in the EU-27 as a whole and in each member state based on official statistics from Eurostat and FAOstat.

This year's edition showed that the average fruit and vegetable consumption in the EU decreased to 350g per day/capita in 2022, a 5 per cent decline from 2021 and almost 3 per cent below the average of the previous five years.

This level was still more than 12 per cent below the minimum 400g per day/capita recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO).

Shrinking market

The Consumption Monitor showed that only six countries in the EU reached the recommended goal of at least 400g of fresh fruits and vegetables per day/capita, leaving a "great margin for improvement to stimulate consumption".

In 2022, the EU-27 fresh produce market size shrank to 71.35m tonnes, Freshfel outlined.

This decrease ended the positive trend that started in 2020 with the Covid-19 pandemic, which the association said had altered the lifestyle of Europeans towards a healthier approach, in addition to improving their attitude towards environmental causes and climate change.

However, as of 2022, fruit and vegetable consumption came back under pressure across the EU because of the economic crisis, rising prices, and generalised inflation impacting the purchasing power of consumers, limiting volume and searching for the most price-friendly option.

“In times of economic uncertainties, consumers tend to move towards a less healthy diet, which is perceived to be more energy satisfactory and a cheaper food option than fruit and vegetables,” said Philippe Binard, general delegate of Freshfel Europe.

“Beyond the findings of 2022 Monitor, the preliminary data for 2023/24 confirms the ongoing declining trends which reached in many cases more than 10 per cent, meaning that the post-pandemic consumption growth has now been totally lost.”

Driving the trends

From the exchange with its members, Freshfel Europe identified several common drivers guiding the latest consumption trends.

These included the decline of household purchases, lower-income households being more impacted by the decline, organic and premium products being under pressure, increased frequency of purchases but with more reduced quantities, and lower sales volume partially compensated by higher prices.

“Freshfel Europe is the ideal platform for the sector to stay informed of the latest trends and have the best access to market intelligence to understand the market dynamic and also coordinate efforts to reinforce the position of fresh produce in the competitive food markets and give a fresh face for the image of fresh produce towards consumers,” said Salvo Laudani, president of Freshfel Europe.

“Collectively we need to demystify image's misperception, address obstacles to consumption and restore the 'heroes' status granted to fresh produce during the pandemic.”

Opportunity missed by policymakers

The association outlined that, as the current legislative term of the EU was coming to an end, the success of the recommended move towards more of a plant diet could be questioned.

Multiple policy incoherences and a lack of consistent measures resulting from the European Green Deal, the Farm to Fork Strategy, the Circular Economy Action Plan, as well as Europe's Beating Cancer Plan have resulted in a failure to shift to a healthier and environmentally friendlier diet, it said.

Freshfel said that the opportunity to set a positive discrimination for fresh produce had failed, with the momentum to significantly strengthen the position of fruit and vegetables in the food assortment “widely missed by policymakers”.

EUROFRUIT guidelines, Nordic Council recommendations and EGEA scientists agree that the ambition and the consumption target need to be raised towards 800g per capita/day," Binard explained.

"While the awareness is there, too many obstacles still prevent the growth," he continued. "The benefits of fruits and vegetables should be better recognised in the promotion policy but also in the upcoming taxonomy debate.

"Besides, misperceptions about prices or safety should be addressed so that consumers can make informed choices."

Industry efforts should continue

In parallel, the sector should continue its efforts and innovation towards more convenience, better taste and texture, target promotion actions towards the youngest and seek support so that fresh produce and affordable and are well present to the most deprived and lower-income households, Binard noted.

Freshfel urged the fruit and vegetable sector and public authorities to join forces and build a sustainable consumption attitude based on the benefits of fresh fruit and vegetables for the planet, the climate, and the health of the consumers themselves.

"There can be no compromise on the urgency of actions needed to address the consumption challenge, most specifically among the youngest generation," it concluded.