

High level conference on Food Authenticity and Integrity

24 June 2016

Brussels

Chair, Ladies and Gentleman,

The day after

It is on behalf of the Netherlands presidency a pleasure and honor to address this important meeting about the integrity of our food production and chain.

In 2013, we were rudely awakened by a number of food fraud incidents. We came to realise how vulnerable our food production structure really is. Or did we? Are we still alert to the dangers, or have we dropped our guard?

Measures were taken at the time. But let's be honest: has anything really changed?

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The discussion about global agriculture and food supplies has changed over the past decades.

Firstly, agriculture and food supply have been industrialized, intensified and scaled-up.

Secondly, food supplies have strongly become more and more international

Trade and direct foreign investments by agrifood businesses have increased. Commodities and food products move cross-country and cross-continently; production chains have become more international. Consumers are demanding more from the producers. They are more critical and ask for more transparency. Food crises both within and outside of the European Union have resulted into a more critical attitude of consumers towards food production.

These developments have led to a change in where, by whom and how food is produced, as well as a change in what is produced and consumed.

In the meantime, the environmental impact of food supply has strongly increased by changing production methods in agriculture.

The increasing number of kilometers travelled by our food and the increasing use of finite production resources are considered to be undesirable developments in this respect.

The discussion at EU level is strongly influenced by the concerns about a significantly lower “farm price plateau”; differences among member states on the necessity for radical changes on account of the ecological sustainability of the agricultural sector; as well as EU priorities and developments in international trade.

On the one hand, there is a call for open markets and world trade in order to strengthen the competitiveness of the European agricultural sector and to contribute to global food supplies by exporting.

On the other hand, there is also a call for the support of small businesses and regionalisation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

From these trends it's becoming clear that chain management is the linking pin.

Every link in the food production chain – every company, organisation or individual farmer – makes some contribution to the end product: the food that we eat every day. The food that keeps us alive and safe. We expect our food to be exactly as you describe it.

Every link in the chain bears joint responsibility for the safety and integrity of our food, every link is therefore jointly responsible for creating and maintaining consumer confidence. After all, it is that confidence on which your livelihoods rely.

This is why food fraud and safety issues affect us all.

Incidents, safety issues and overproduction in this new context serve to emphasise the importance of a *reliable* product. The end product must be reliable in order to maintain both the consumer's trust and the international position of the European agrifood sector.

We could introduce yet more rules and regulations. We could make the existing legislation even stricter. We

could increase regulatory capacity and put more inspectors in the field. But the situation demands a shift in attitude and behaviour on the part of both the supply chain and the consumer.

Everyone must accept and act upon their responsibility for the chain as a whole and for their own part of the production process.

This is of huge importance because every link in the chain has a contribution to make. If any one link fails, there is no chain.

It is time to put an end to the lack of commitment we now see within the chain. There is something of an 'anything goes' attitude. It must be replaced by commitment and transparency.

This is why meetings such as this are so important. We must share our knowledge and experience at the European and international level. We must plan joint action which allows us to formulate and fulfil our collective responsibility.

We must refine the definition of 'chain responsibility', setting out exactly how the various links are held together.

We must define our own individual responsibilities as well as our responsibility for each other and for the end product – the food which will be eaten by people just like you and me.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me offer a few 'key concepts':

- **Transparency** within the chain...
 - ...with regard to the product, the production method and the origins
 - ... with regard to cost prices, margins and the business model
 - ... with regard to the structure of your chain, and the precise route along which the product makes its way from the land to the consumer.
 - Devote close attention to traceability.

- Resolve the 'information gap' which currently affects the entire chain.

- In terms of **chain responsibility**, there must be:
 - Good and fair contracts between business partners, perhaps relying on closed chains.
 - a willingness to draw attention to any shortcomings, and to hold others liable where necessary.
 - a willingness to report problems, whether to a sector federation or, where appropriate, the regulatory authorities.

- **Self regulation:**
 - Ensure that the 'checks and balances' are in order, not only within your own operation but in your immediate business setting of suppliers and customers, as well as in the chain of which you form part.
 - Make agreements within your chain with regard to honest trading practices and honest products, perhaps in the form of a Code of Conduct.

- Ensure that your quality management system produces clear and reliable results.
- Give your product a 'brand' which is recognised and respected by your customers and the consumer.

This is not a question of 'either... or'. It is a question of 'and... and'.

All these elements in combination will underpin the transition to a more sustainable, more robust food production system that is able to win and keep the consumer's trust and confidence.

Let me close:

"You must be the change you wish to see in the world, especially for our children and grandchildren. "

With these wise words of Ghandi I wish you a very successful conference.

Thank you.