

ASSEMBLY OF EUROPEAN
HORTICULTURAL REGIONS



ACTIVITY REPORT
2023



ASSEMBLY OF EUROPEAN HORTICULTURAL REGIONS

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EDITO FROM THE PRESIDENT

SIMONA CASELLI



Photo © Fabrizio Dell'Aquila

2023 was a year of great successes.

Five new members have joined AREFLH, bringing the total number of countries represented to 13. The organisations are the Occitanie region, Växthus Helsingborg APO (Sweden) and Gasa Odense PO (Denmark). Besides, the Association Climatique de la Moyenne-Garonne (France) and Agrotech Innovations (Cyprus) have joined the College of Experts.

I would like to thank our members for their trust, and I am delighted to welcome these new organisations, which will enable AREFLH to increase its representativeness in Europe and acquire new skills.

In 2023, AREFLH's position as a **privileged interlocutor of the institutions** is undeniable since we have been invited to represent the voice of fruit and vegetable production at the European Commission's EU Agricultural Outlook Conference. This is a major success!

Our ongoing and effective **dialogue with DG AGRI on the CMO** has proved fundamental not only for the normal management of the implementation of the market measures provided for in the new CAP, but also for dealing quickly, effectively and with concrete results with the disastrous situations caused by the drought and flooding that have occurred in certain member regions. Thanks to AREFLH's action, these regions were able to request and obtain major derogations and adjustments to the operational programmes of the APOs concerned.

Our presence in the **EU CAP Network, five Civil Dialogue Groups, market observatories and DG AGRI expert groups** also gives us a high profile and a unique opportunity to defend our positions.

Following the General Assembly, a **new working group was set up on the theme of water**. Its aim is to bring together members representing the three AREFLH colleges to discuss issues related to water use, share knowledge on the best possible use of this resource and the solutions put in place in our regions to deal with its scarcity.

AREFLH also plays an important role in **disseminating research results**, being a partner in four European projects. In this area, AREFLH has also proved over the last few years that it is an important stakeholder in the implementation of projects, thanks to the experience it has acquired and the strength of its network.

In 2024, a new project will start with the aim of **improving soil health** and ecosystem services through the co-creation, co-implementation and testing of solutions to reduce erosion, improve soil structure, reduce the impact of intensive use of fertilisers and pesticides, increase water storage, improve soil biodiversity and overall soil resilience.

All these points illustrate the rich and intense activity of our association, which for several years has been striving to fulfil its missions to the best of its ability in the service of European fruit and vegetable regions and producers; this work will continue in 2024.



ABOUT AREFLH

ABOUT AREFLH

Objectives and missions

The Assembly of European Horticultural Regions is an association created in 2000 on the initiative of a group of Spanish, French and Italian regions.

It represents the voice of the fruit and vegetable and horticulture producing regions and their producer organisations in Europe.

The specificity of the AREFLH, its strength, lies in its original structure. It is composed of **three colleges: the College of Regions, the College of Producers and the College of Associate Members, consultants and experts.** The complementarity of these three colleges allows joint work and common positions between regions and producers' representatives.

To represent and defend the economic and social interests of the fruit, vegetables and flower sector before the European and international institutions.

To encourage exchanges of experience, partnerships, and joint projects between associate members.

To suggest solutions on the main policies affecting the fruit and vegetable and horticulture sectors.

Governance



PRESIDENT

Simona Caselli,
Delegated by the Emilia-Romagna Region

VICE-PRESIDENT

Jean-Louis Moulon,
President of IDfel Val de Loire

REGION'S COLLEGE

PRODUCERS' COLLEGE

COLLEGE OF
ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Chaired by Simona Caselli

BUREAU

President, Vice-Chairman, Treasurer, Secretary

Priority themes and working groups

Common Agricultural Policy and the CMO



Research and innovation



Promotion and education on healthy eating



Working groups

CMO

Water

Climate Change

Promotion

Crop protection

F&V School Scheme

Administrative team



General Secretary: Pauline Panegos
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European Projects Officer (Brussels office): Eriselda Canaj
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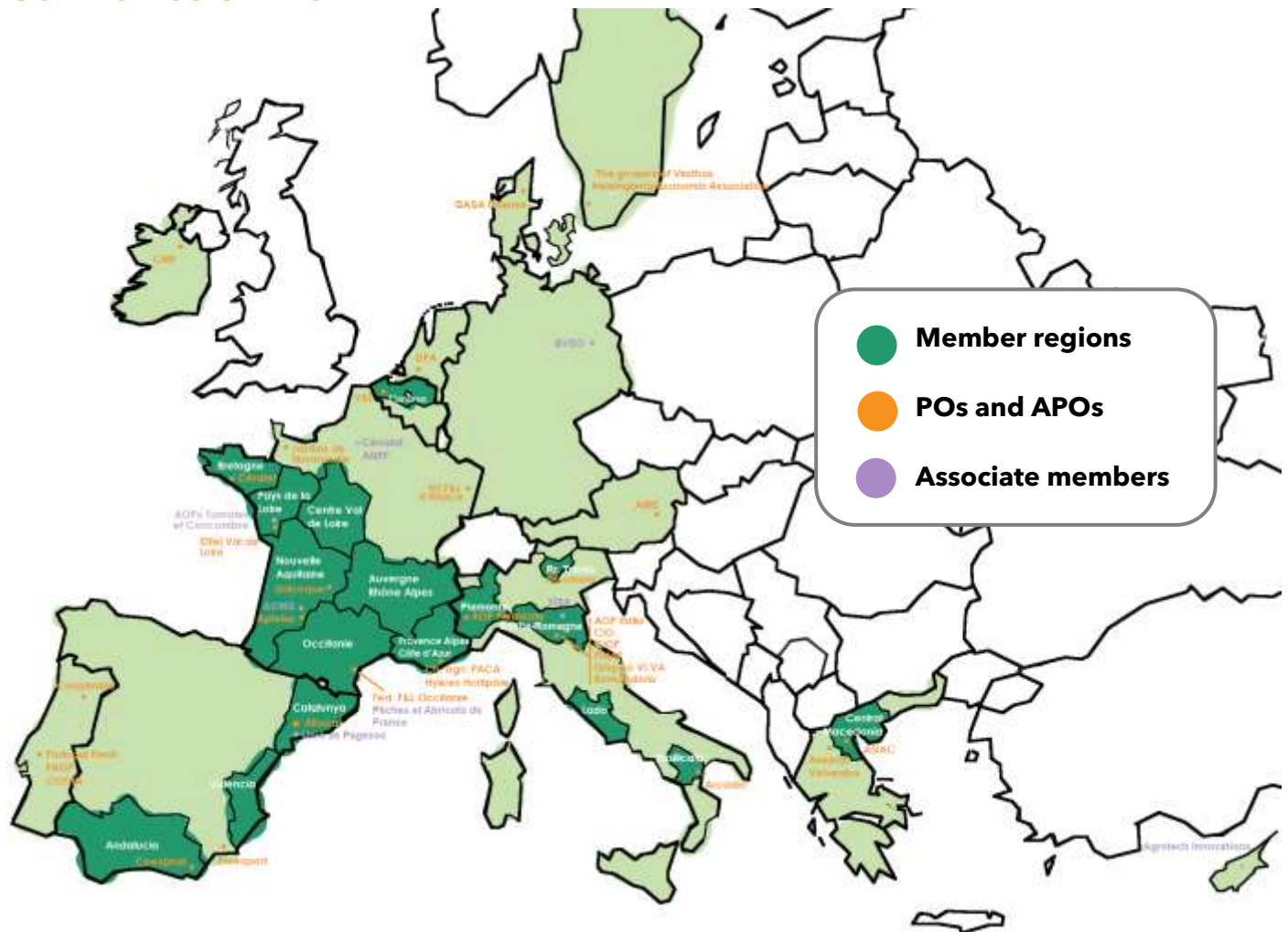
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From left to right:

Luca Contrino, Laetitia Forget, Simona Caselli, Jean-Louis Moulon, Eriselda Canaj, Pauline Panegos

Image © Filippo Corbo

Our members in 2024



Regions

- Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes Region
- Brittany Region
- Central Macedonia Region
- Centre-Val de Loire Region
- Flanders Region
- Generalitat de Catalunya
- Generalitat de Valencia
- Junta de Andalucía
- Nouvelle-Aquitaine Region
- Occitania Region
- Pays de la Loire Region
- Provincia Autonoma di Trento
- Regione Basilicata
- Regione Emilia Romagna
- Regione Lazio
- Regione Piemonte
- Région Sud (Provence Alpes Côte d'Azur)

APO's

- Afrucat
- AMC
- AOP Arcadia
- AOP Italia

- AOP Piemonte
- APFELSO
- ASIAC
- Assomela
- Cerafel
- CIO
- CIOP
- Coexphal
- COTHN
- DPA
- FINAF
- FNOP
- Gruppo VI.VA.
- IDFEL
- Interprofession Fruits et légumes Alsace
- Jardins de Normandie
- Occitania Fruit and Vegetables Federation
- Portugal Fresh
- PACA Chamber of Agriculture
- Proexport
- Romandiola

- The growers of Vaxthus Helsingborg Economic Association
- VBT

PO's

- ASEPOP Velventos
- CMP
- Coopenela
- GASA Odense
- Hyeres Hortipôle
- Unicoque

Associate members

- ACMG
- Agrotech Innovations
- ANPP
- AOP Pêche et Abricot de France
- BVEO
- Cénaldi
- Stea
- Tomates et Concombres de France
- Unio de Pagesos de Catalunya



HIGHLIGHTS 2023



5 new members

➤➤➤ 60 in total

3 new countries

➤➤➤ 13 in total

Denmark | Cyprus | Sweden



1 Expert group

of the European Commission for Food Security Crisis Preparedness and Response Mechanism

5

Market observatories

of DG Agri :
Stone fruits | Tomatoes | Pip fruits | Citrus | Fertilizer



1 Intervention during the Agri Outlook conference

of the European Commission

9

Meetings with European Institutions



4 European projects

SmartProtect | LowInFood
Novasoil | Waste4Soil



5

Civil dialogue groups



CAP and Strategic Plans
Environment and climate change
Organic farming
Quality and promotion
International aspects of agriculture

JANUARY - FEBRUARY 2023

INSTITUTIONAL MEETINGS IN BRUSSELS

Meeting with DG AGRI

Simona Caselli and Luca Contrino met with representatives from DG AGRI. The meeting was an opportunity to start a discussion on our current working themes, such as packaging, pesticides, and the publication of the regulation amending Regulation 2022/126 (delegated regulation establishing the conditions for sectoral interventions in operational programmes).

Meeting with DG ENV

AREFLH organised a hybrid meeting with DG ENV on 17 January. This was organised to establish contact and to highlight certain concerns of the sector regarding the draft regulation amending the rules on packaging and packaging residues.

Presentation meeting with the Committee of the Regions

A hybrid meeting was also organised with the Committee of the Regions on 17 January. The aim was to present AREFLH's activities, as well as to establish themes of common interest such as crop protection, the legislative framework for a sustainable food system and the certification of carbon sequestration.

Luca Contrino also spoke at the stakeholder consultation organised by the Committee of the Regions on the legislative framework for a sustainable food system.

His speech focused on the need to define sustainability in economic, environmental and social terms, the need to define responsibilities at each administrative level (European, national, regional, etc.) and decide how to organise the labelling of products according to the different systems of "sustainable" production. See p.22.

Presentation meeting with Camilla Laureti MEP



Jean-Louis Moulon, Pauline Panegos and Luca Contrino met MEP Camilla Laureti in Brussels on 24 January.

The meeting provided an opportunity to present the association and highlight the actions underway in Brussels: packaging, energy, sustainable use of pesticides and the legislative framework for a sustainable food system.

Mrs. Laureti confirmed her willingness to start an exchange with the AREFLH on these themes as well as on the programme to promote the consumption of fruit and vegetables in schools.

AREFLH meeting with the EU CAP Network team

Simona Caselli, Pauline Panegos, Luca Contrino and Eriselda Canaj met Elena García Garrido (network contact point) at the offices of the EU CAP Network in Brussels on 26 January.

The meeting consisted of a presentation of AREFLH, of the CAP network, its objectives, and a discussion on the possibilities for collaboration.



AREFLH then took part in the first meeting of the EU CAP Network in Brussels on 6 March.

The meeting allowed us to find out more about how the network works, to establish contacts with other organisations involved in the network's activities, and to allow network members to express their expectations of its activities and operation.

Meeting with DG SANTE

Jean-Louis Moulon and Luca Contrino, accompanied by Laurianne Le Leslé (AOP Tomates et Concombres), Luc Vanoirbeek (VBT) and Wim Rodenburg (DPA), met DG SANTE representatives in Brussels on 2 March.

The purpose of the meeting was to present the AREFLH to the DG SANTE departments responsible for labelling agri-food products, to establish channels of communication on the revision of the Consumer Information (INCO) regulation being drawn up, and to discuss the potential implications of this revision for the fruit and vegetable sector.

Civil Dialogue Groups

AREFLH has been selected to sit on five DG AGRI Civil Dialogue Groups dealing with priority themes in the new programming period.

- CAP and Strategic Plans
- Environment and climate change
- Quality and promotion
- Organic farming
- International aspects of agriculture.

MARCH 2023

Annual General Meeting in Lleida, Catalonia



The general meeting was held on 22 and 23 March in Lleida and was organised with the support of Afrucat and the Catalonia Region.

The public conference analysed the sensitive issues and dossiers accompanying the introduction of the new CAP and the Green Deal, such as climate change and packaging.

Following the event, AREFLH submitted proposals for amendments to the packaging regulation. See p. 23.

APRIL 2023

MyFruit webinar on the draft packaging regulation

On 28 April, Simona Caselli took part in the MyFruit.it webinar on the draft regulation on packaging, the application of the directive on the sustainable use of pesticides, and the regulatory proposals on nutritional and environmental labelling.

MAY 2023

AREFLH at the Macfrut trade fair in Rimini

During Macfrut, Luca Contrino, our Europe mission officer, presented an overview of the fruit and vegetables in Europe and exports to Vietnam, as well as the opportunities for Vietnamese fruit and vegetables to be exported to the EU thanks to the Europe-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement.



Simona Caselli also represented AREFLH during Macfrut, where she attended the round table on "Hazelnuts and carbon credits: an opportunity for change".

The carbon credit market offers good prospects, signalling a major paradigm shift that could lead to recognition of the right weight of the carbon footprint of agriculture and production.

Hazelnut growing is attractive because of its superior ability to absorb excess CO₂ in the air, the main cause of global warming and climate change.

Meeting with Spanish REPER

On 22 May, Luca Contrino met officials from the agriculture section of Spain's Permanent Representation to the European Union. He presented AREFLH's activities and main working themes. He also stressed the urgency of the issue of water for the fruit and vegetable sector.

Meeting with the Andalusia region



On 23 May, Pauline Panegos, General Secretary, and Eriselda Canaj, European Projects Officer, met representatives of the Andalusia region in Seville.

The delegation was led by Armando Martinez Vilela, Agriculture and Livestock Coordinator at the General Secretariat for Agriculture. Other representatives from various departments were also present.

The meeting began with a presentation of current actions and dossiers, followed by a discussion on issues of interest to the region: the CAP and producer organisations, relations with third countries, plant health, the environment & climate change, and European research and innovation projects.

JUNE 2023

EU-India Free Trade Agreement

At the request of DG AGRI, AREFLH provided "defensive" and "offensive" points to better support the European Commission in its negotiations with the Indian authorities on the European Union's free trade agreement with this country.

Fertiliser market observatory

Following the call for applications launched by DG AGRI, AREFLH's application to join the fertiliser market observatory was accepted. This group monitors the developments in fertiliser availability, market trends and the challenges faced.

Juan Luis Hurtado Golbano (Coexphal) is AREFLH's designated representative on this market observatory.

Videoconference meeting with DG ENV

Following the meeting with DG AGRI on the damage caused by the floods in Emilia-Romagna, AREFLH met with DG ENV on the theme of water on 16 June.

The purpose of this meeting was to present the issues that AREFLH members are concerned about in relation to water, and to open a dialogue on the measures that the European Commission could consider in the long run to meet the challenges caused by the water situation in Europe.

Water working group

AREFLH members who take part in the working group on water held their first meeting on 23 June. They worked on a forthcoming meeting with DG Climate and planned the working group's tasks for the months to come.

Meetings with the Veneto and Wielkopolska regions

On 4 July, AREFLH took part in an introductory meeting with the Veneto region at their offices in Brussels. Another meeting with the Polish region of Wielkopolska was held on 11 July.

The aim of these two meetings was to present the internal structures and the themes most often addressed by AREFLH, as well as to develop common interests given the high level of agricultural activity in these two regions.

Meeting with the delegation from the Val de Loire region



Luca Contrino and Eriselda Canaj met the delegation from the Centre-Val de Loire Region at their offices in Brussels.

Our two representatives presented the association to Temanuata Girard, the Vice President in charge of Agriculture and Food, who was in Brussels at the time.

AUGUST 2023

Extreme weather events: exemption regulations

On 9 August, the European Commission published two implementing regulations formalising some of the derogations proposed by AREFLH following the extreme weather events in Emilia-Romagna and Catalonia. See p 21.

SEPTEMBER 2023

Research and innovation: funding opportunities under Horizon Europe

AREFLH took part in Cluster 6's "Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources, Agriculture and the Environment" information day in Brussels from 26 to 28 September.

The overall aim of this event is to promote funding opportunities, explain the themes of the calls under the 2024 work programme and encourage participation.

The idea of these two days is also to find partners to form consortia and present proposals.

The 2024 work programme includes 75 new topics and proposes more than €890 million in EU funding.

OCTOBER 2023

Meeting with the organisation "Le Collège des Producteurs"

AREFLH organised a mutual presentation meeting with "Le Collège des Producteurs", who represents the agricultural sectors active in Wallonia.

We presented our structure and working themes and found elements for a possible future collaboration.

NOVEMBER 2023

Best practice forum, EU CAP Network, Brussels



On 16 November Luca Contrino spoke at the 3rd meeting of the "From Farm to Fork" Forum, whose main theme was "Responses to the cost-of-living crisis".

He led a discussion session on the green and digital transition of producer organisations in this economic context of rising production and operating costs.

The forum brought together representatives from European institutions, national agencies responsible for agriculture and other stakeholders. The topic was analysed from several different perspectives.

Despite the highly sensitive nature of the subject, the best practice forum revealed a cross-cutting consensus regarding the identification of the main problems leading to a cost-of-living crisis, and the need to adopt shared solutions along the agri-food value chain, and therefore not to impose responsibility for a green and digital transition solely on certain players in the agri-food system.

ICOP 2023

Simona Caselli was a speaker at ICOP 2023, the International Congress of Fruit and Vegetable Producers' Organisations, on 22 November in Almería, Spain. She spoke about sustainability, food security and climate change. She stressed the need to continue to focus on sustainable packaging for fruit and vegetables.



DECEMBER 2023

Participation in EU-Canada Dialogue activities

For the first time, AREFLH took part in activities linked to the EU-Canada Dialogue, organised as part of the "EU Agri Food Days 2023".

Discussions focused on the future of agriculture and opportunities for collaboration between the European Union and Canada on sustainable transition objectives for the sector.

Simona Caselli at the Agricultural Outlook Conference

On 6 and 7 December, AREFLH President Simona Caselli was invited by the European Commission to speak at the Agri Outlook conference.

The event took stock of the outlooks for European agriculture, agricultural market trends, food security, sustainability, digital technologies and data flows, in collaboration with farmers, EU policymakers, business representatives, analysts and digital experts.



Simona Caselli spoke during the session on medium-term prospects for agriculture on 7 December. She stressed the importance of **producers aggregation together in APOs and POs**. This is the only way the smallest structures can benefit from the innovations that are essential for the transition to sustainable farming practices. These innovations include digital technology, precision farming and big data.

Simona Caselli also stated that working on improving **risk management systems** is necessary.

Finally, with regard to the promotion of fruit and vegetables, she pointed out that it is essential to develop educational work with consumers so that they understand that F&V can be easy to prepare and inexpensive.

Find out more: agriculture.ec.europa.eu/eu-agri-food-days_en



WORKING THEMES &
ACTIONS IN BRUSSELS

Common Agricultural Policy and Common Market Organisation for fruit and vegetables

In 2023, AREFLH tackled the themes linked to the new programming period on several occasions during meetings with DG AGRI. The CAP and the CMO were also on the agenda of the General Assembly, where the representatives of the European Commission summarized the points of convergence and rupture between the old and new programming periods.

Extreme weather events

Throughout 2023, AREFLH has observed with great concern the extreme weather events that have taken place across Europe. Their common theme: water and its consequences, whether excess or shortage. The drought in several European countries, particularly Spain, and the flooding in Emilia-Romagna in early 2023 have affected AREFLH members.



AREFLH organised two meetings with DG AGRI in May to highlight the difficulties created by the drought in Catalonia, to present the data obtained by the Emilia-Romagna region on the damage caused by the floods and the measures requested by the national administration to ease the pressure on operational programmes.

Following these meetings, AREFLH put forward **proposals aimed at helping regions in water-related crisis situations:**

- A waiver for 2023 for commitments to research and environmental expenditure,
- The possibility of increasing EU co-financing,
- Gradual application of the safeguard clause for the Value of the Marketed Production,
- Extraordinary support for the 2024 and 2025 operational programmes,
- A waiver of repayment of the aid,
- An exemption from irrigation restrictions,
- A derogation from the main activity,
- Exemptions from the compulsory minimum percentage of checks on producer organisations and their operational programmes,
- An extension of "force majeure" treatment to first pillar programmes,
- The creation of an emergency fund and specific insurance funds.

In August the European Commission published two Implementing Regulations (2023/1619 & 2023/1620) and Delegated Regulations in September (2023/1975 and 2023/1976) which formalise some of the derogations proposed by AREFLH.

The publication of these regulations confirms **AREFLH's fundamental role in formulating legislative proposals that meet the needs of the fruit and vegetable sector in the most difficult situations**, as well as the value attributed to these proposals by DG AGRI and the other leading European institutions.

The AREFLH position paper is available on the www.areflh.org website (About us > Position papers).

Promotional policy

AREFLH is part of a coalition of 16 organisations representing the European agri-food sector. Several actions were carried out by this coalition in 2023.

In January, in a letter to Commissioners Timmermans and Wojciechowski, these organisations expressed their concern at the delays in publishing the proposed revision of the EU's promotion policy for agricultural and food products.

In June, another letter was sent to Commissioners Kyriakides, Sinkevicius and Wojciechowski, in which the coalition suggested nine principles to be included in the proposed framework regulation for a sustainable food system:

- Food safety
- Inclusion
- Generational renewal
- Transparency and fairness in the food value chain
- Progressiveness, long-term visibility and legal certainty
- Support for innovation
- A holistic approach to health
- Circularity and bioeconomy
- Trade and global perspectives.

Furthermore, during the meetings of the Civil Dialogue Group on the promotion of agricultural products and quality held in 2023, AREFLH members had the opportunity to defend the fruit and vegetable budget for the next annual programming period.



Other position papers and public consultations

Sustainable food system

Luca Contrino represented AREFLH at the stakeholder consultation organised by the Committee of the Regions' Commission for Natural Resources (NAT) on the draft legislative framework for a sustainable food system, which took place on 30 January.

The consultation was an opportunity to reiterate AREFLH's position on the proposal and to highlight the main concerns, including :

- The **need to include social and economic sustainability** alongside environmental sustainability in the framework.
- The **need for clarity regarding the labelling of sustainable products.**
- More **information on the structures needed for communication** between the various stakeholders.

Find out more at www.areflh.org (About us > Position statements).

AREFLH is also one of 31 organisations from the European Union's agri-food chain which, on 12 May 2023, joined forces and sent a letter to the European Commission. They called for greater involvement in drawing up the future legislative framework for sustainable food systems.

Lastly, AREFLH also co-signed a letter with the promotion coalition to European Commissioners Kyriakides, Wojciechowksi, and Sinkevicius calling for regular dialogue with agri-food stakeholders to **develop a clear definition of sustainability** and **solid, relevant indicators** for the monitoring framework of the Farm to Fork Strategy.

Draft regulation on the certification of carbon removals

AREFLH reacted to the publication of the draft European regulation on the certification of carbon absorptions by highlighting various points:

- The absence of conditions on the purchase of certifications,
- The absence of definitions of "carbon removal activities",
- Lack of clarity about the supervisory authorities,
- Lack of information on prices,
- Competition from third countries on carbon prices,
- The need to specify the actions planned for other greenhouse gases.

Read the full document at www.areflh.org (About us > Position statements).



Draft regulation on packaging

In March 2023, AREFLH issued several recommendations concerning amendments to the draft regulation on packaging and packaging waste.

These recommendations include **the elimination of the packaging ban for any quantity of fruit and vegetables under 1.5 kg**, **a review of the requirements for recyclable packaging**, and **the introduction of a harmonised label** to ensure consistent treatment of packaging and its residues.

In April, AREFLH sent comments on the draft regulation on packaging and packaging residues via the European Commission's public initiatives portal. The document highlights a number of points:

- The lack of recognition of different needs, particularly for products that are sensitive to bruising,
- Excessive pressure on producer organisations,
- Uncertainty about the availability of alternatives,
- The need to harmonize European rules,
- The need to avoid attempts at greenwashing via biodegradable stickers,
- The risk of disrupting existing value chains by focusing on re-use rather than recycling,
- The importance of avoiding discrepancies with third countries.

Read the full document at www.areflh.org (About us > Position statements).

Other actions have been taken on this issue:

- **A letter** was sent **to the members from the European Parliament's Environment Committee (COMENVI)** asking them to take into account the recommendations for amendments to the draft regulation made by the Agriculture Committee (COMAGRI) and the Industry, Research and Energy Committee (ITRE).
- A **letter co-signed with AREPO was sent to the Permanent Representatives for Agriculture of the Member States**, in which the two associations call for special attention to be paid to factors that could create difficulties for PDO and PGI fruit and vegetables.

Draft regulation on the revision of marketing standards

In May, AREFLH submitted its comments on the draft regulation proposing revisions to marketing standards. The comments were as follows:

- The additional conditions for fruit intended for the "fourth range" would lead to a **considerable increase in the price** of these products,
- The proposed changes could increase **food waste**,
- The risk of a possible **drop in fruit and vegetable consumption**,
- The need to **highlight products originating from the European Union**.

Read the full document at www.areflh.org (About us > position statements).



SMARTPROTECT

The SmartProtect project is a **thematic network** focusing on the sharing of knowledge on **intelligent IPM solutions for farmers and advisors**. Its aim is to stimulate the flow of knowledge in regional AKIS (Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems) across the EU. Another aim is to bring attention on the innovation potential of advanced methodologies for Integrated Pest Management (IPM) in vegetable production. The project integrates precision agriculture technologies and data analysis.



As part of the project, AREFLH organised an online training course on 20 April 2023 entitled "The SmartProtect project and its platform: Smart IPM techniques".

The training provided information about the project in general and about its platform in particular. The course presented various intelligent integrated production techniques and the results of a number of field-based case studies.



During the course, examples of insect monitoring technologies in Belgium were presented, including **insect identification in Flanders**, a region that is developing new advanced detection and data analysis technologies, with a focus on apps. The region is also working on other case studies such as image analysis and wingbeat data.

Also during the course, UV technologies to combat pests were presented, in particular their effect on living organisms and the different types of existing technologies (UV boosting, CromaticNET, BIOCAPTUR).

The results of trials on **powdery mildew on courgettes** were also commented on. In addition, the course focused on detection apps such as: Cropalyse, Buntata, Planticus, Agrix Tech App, Crop-scanner App, Cropwise Imagery, Cropify.

For more information, visit www.smartprotect-h2020.eu

This project was funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020 framework programme for research and innovation under grant agreement no. 862563.

NOVASOIL

The NOVASOIL project focuses on **"Innovative business models for soil health" in Europe**. Its overall objective is to **highlight the benefits of investing in soil health for society and the environment**. To achieve this objective, a toolbox will be developed to analyse the relevance of different business cases that promote soil health. This toolbox will be based on a series of best practices in Europe and other countries, it will be adapted to the needs and demands of society.



As part of the project, AREFLH organised the first online information event on 3 February 2023 under the title "Presentation of the NOVASOIL project".



The objectives of the event were to inform participants about the project, strengthen links and involvement of key stakeholders, implement strategies for information flow and joint work, support successful surveys and questionnaires and launch innovations for further participation in project activities. In addition, one last aim was to receive feedback from participants.

For more information: www.novasoil-project.eu

This project is funded by the European Union's Horizon Europe research and innovation programme under grant agreement no. 101091268.

LOWINFOOD

The LOWINFOOD project focuses on the **"design of low-waste food value chains through the demonstration of innovative solutions"**.

LOWINFOOD supports the reduction of food loss and waste in the European Union by using a multi-actor approach that involves stakeholders throughout the value chain.



In practice, the main aim of the project is to **measure the extent to which these innovations reduce the loss and waste of fruit and vegetables throughout the supply chain, to improve its efficiency and increase the use and consumption of fruit and vegetables** through recovery and redistribution.

The project also provides training and capacity-building workshops. One of the workshops in 2023 was devoted to the software platform for managing the withdrawal of fruit and vegetable surpluses from the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), as a best practice to be transferred to other European countries.



The workshop was held on 18 and 19 October 2023. AREFLH was present as the organisation responsible for finding a partner to replicate the initiative. The aim was to disseminate across Europe the innovative model successfully implemented in Italy, in the Emilia-Romagna region. LowinFood builds on the experience acquired in Italy through the development and use of the S.I.R (*Sistema Informativo Ritiri*): this software platform is used to **manage surpluses of fresh fruit and vegetable products**, which are grouped together under the European measure of 'market withdrawals' and distributed to charities. The latter are considered extremely avant-garde in the European panorama.

This S.I.R. web application has increased the quantity of products distributed by **more than 90%**

compared with the total quantity of withdrawals made in Romania (figures and variety of products). The various players in the process were present in the workshop: the region, producer organisations, charities and agri-food centres, which provide significant logistical support thanks to their facilities and expertise). Everyone was able to explain the advantages of this system and how full digitisation has helped to improve it and enable more and more **low-income families to introduce fresh fruit and vegetables into their diet.**

The workshop also included a live demonstration of the S.I.R platform, giving the Romanian delegation the opportunity to test the programme. Each of the players was able to test the tool with their own specific user profile.

For more information, visit www.lowinfood.eu

This project is funded by the European Union's "Horizon 2020" research and innovation framework programme under grant agreement no. 101000439.

WASTE4SOIL

The Waste4Soil project aims at "*Turning food waste into sustainable soil improvers for better soil health and improved food system*". It is a new project started in June 2023. It is funded by the European Commission as part of the European mission "A Soil Deal for Europe".

Waste4Soil is to develop **recycling techniques** that can be used to **transform food processing residues into soil improvers, using a circular, systemic and multi-stakeholder approach.**

All the players in the food chain are involved at regional level, which makes it possible to close specific loops (nutrients, organic matter, water).



The project involves the development of **10 technological and methodological solutions** for recycling food industry residues into local, organic, circular soil improvers. A standardised, user-oriented assessment framework will help stakeholders in the value chain, such as waste managers, to assess their status with regards to the circularity of food processing residues and to act to recycle appropriate waste streams into beneficial soil amendments.

To ensure co-innovation and collaborative research, Waste4Soil will set up **7 living labs** across Europe, in **Greece, Finland, Spain, Poland, Hungary, Italy and Slovenia**, to study the recovery of **8 types of food processing residues** (meat, fish, dairy products, cereals, olive oil, wine, fruit and vegetables and processed foods).

The Waste4Soil consortium brings together more than **28 institutions from 9 European countries and Switzerland**, covering a wide range of stakeholders (associations, universities, companies, institutions).

On 20 and 21 June 2023, the **Waste4Soil project kick-off meeting** was held in **Thessaloniki (Greece)**. The two-day meeting provided an opportunity for the project partners to meet for the first time and discuss the project's overall strategy. The work package and task managers presented their planned activities and refined the management approaches and tasks.

As a partner in the project, AREFLH's mission will be to develop guidelines and tools to help **territories transform food processing residues into soil conditioners, within the framework of the circular economy and business management** (collaboration with similar projects).

This Horizon Europe project will run for the next four years, with results expected in 2027.

For more information visit www.waste4soil.eu

This project is funded by the European Union's Horizon Europe research and innovation programme under grant agreement no. 101112708

Product focus: pear and hazelnut

Interpera - international pear congress

AREFLH and Afrucat co-organised Interpera 2023 in Lleida, Catalonia, on 28 and 29 June.



The congress brought together 140 players from the international pear industry. Harvest forecasts and climate change were the main themes of the event.

Speakers discussed strategies such as drip irrigation, drought-resistant varieties and the importance of planting trees to mitigate global warming. The conference also highlighted the analysis of the distribution of the CO₂ footprint in the cultivation and handling of pears.

Interpera is an itinerant conference, hosted each year in a different producer country. Afrucat had already organised the event in 2008 and 2012. The association was a key partner in the creation of the congress in 2008. At the time, the European pear industry needed an event to unite producers around common issues.

Further information: www.interpera.org



Hazelnut - Group Corylus Europae

The Corylus Europae Group is made up of organisations representing the 3 main hazelnut-producing countries in Europe (Italy, France and Spain). The Group represents nearly 80% of European hazelnut production and has set itself the following objectives:

- To be a **network exchanging** on all matters related to the European hazelnut ;
- To take **joint action**, in particular with the European Union, to support the hazelnut production industry in Europe;
- To build a **common identity** and promote **sustainable, high-quality hazelnut production in Europe.**



In 2023, the group met several times and drew up a manifesto for the sustainability of hazelnut cultivation in the European Union. The document brought to light :

- A **drastic fall in production** in the 3 main countries, despite a significant increase in the number of hectares planted in recent years.
- Major crop losses in recent seasons due to the **consequences of climate change** (prolonged droughts, heat waves, extreme temperatures, late frosts, etc.).
- Greater **proliferation of endemic pests** in crops, as well as the appearance of new pests and diseases, previously non-existent or secondary, which are more virulent in crops.

- **The impossibility of adequately protecting crops** in accordance with current regulations and the integrated management criteria established by the EU.
- **The different criteria for regulating and authorising the use of plant protection products** between EU countries and non-EU countries.

On the basis of this information, the Corylus Europae Group is calling for measures to be taken at European level to :

- **Develop Europe's production capacity**, which is currently under threat, through appropriate measures to mitigate the effects of climate change and its serious consequences for European agriculture.
- **Promote** crop protection **defenses through a realistic and ecologically viable model.**
- **Harmonise regulations** on the registration and use of plant protection products and facilitate mutual recognition between EU countries.
- **Raise consumer awareness** on the quality of European hazelnuts and communicate about the measures ensuring that imported hazelnuts meet quality standards.



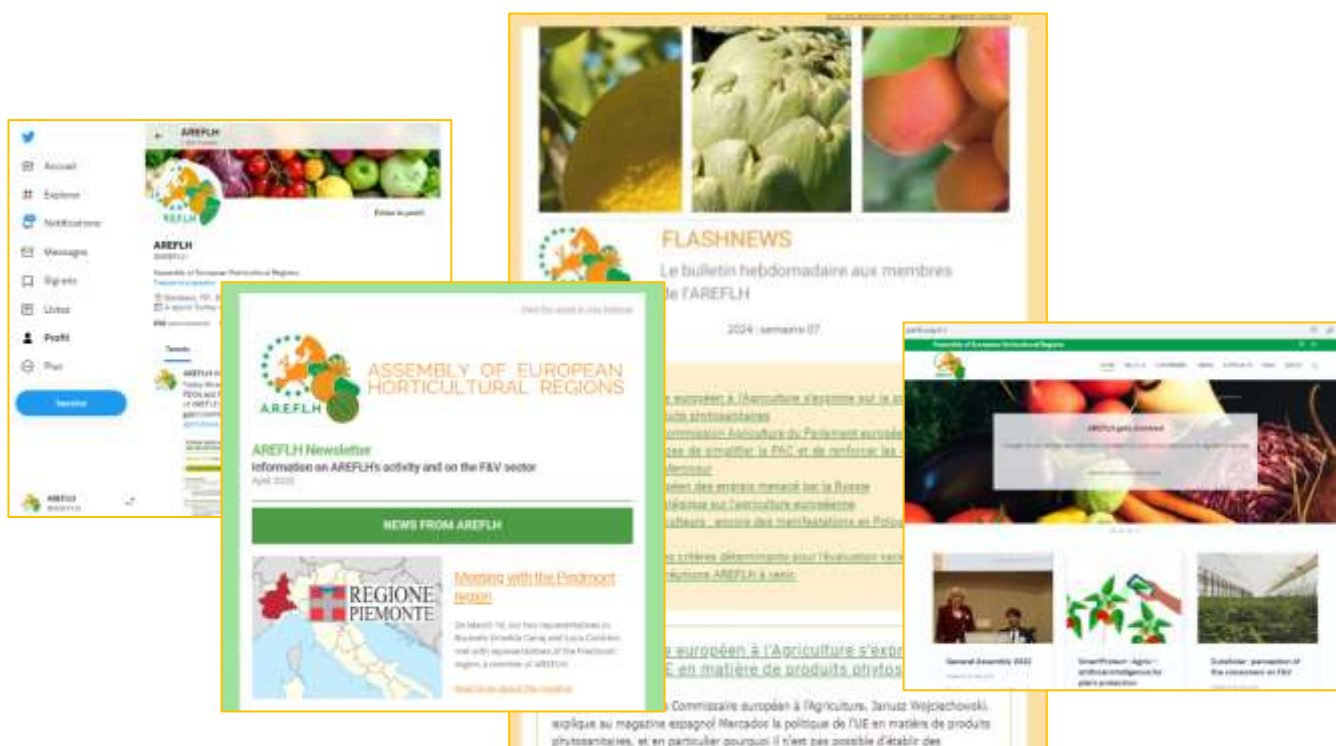
COMMUNICATION

MEANS OF COMMUNICATION



It is important for AREFLH to regularly communicate with its members, partners and stakeholders in the horticultural sector through a variety of channels:

- The website www.areflh.org.
- Weekly emails (AREFLH Flashnews) reserved for members of the association, with news from the sector and the European institutions.
- The monthly newsletter, sent in French and English to members and subscribers. It includes a review of the association's recent activities, information about our members, news from the sector and the EU, and a section with fruit and vegetable events in Europe. Read the newsletters on the website (media > newsletter) and register for free.
- The [@areflh](https://twitter.com/areflh) X/Twitter account.
- The monthly videoconference meeting of members, during which are discussed current issues, projects in progress and upcoming meetings. This is a time for exchanging ideas. Members also mention their own events or a particular challenge faced by their organisation.



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