

## **Introductory remarks by the chair**

Commissioner Fischer Boel,  
Commissioner Kyprianou,  
President-in-Council Seehofer,  
The Honourable Jan Mulder and Honourable Members of  
Parliament,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to open this conference on Food Quality Certification – adding value to farm produce.

Quality is an area in which European farmers are highly competitive. Our agriculture follows high standards and excels in production of quality products. It is also, however, a highly complex subject. The many different aspects of quality are reflected in the great number of schemes and logos that can be found on the market today.

Some of these schemes highlight very specific aspects of quality—for example, a closely defined production method or a very precise area of origin—while other schemes focus more on the quality management system that needs to be followed by all actors in the supply chain.

Farmers and producers can use quality certification to improve their marketing position and distinguish their products from others. The food industry and retailers may rely on quality

certification for extra assurance and legal security. Consumers want to know what they are buying and it is labelling that gives them the possibility to make an informed choice.

The European Parliament, under the initiative of Mr Mulder, has taken a great interest in this subject. With their support, DG Agriculture and Rural Development launched a Pilot Project to study the vast range of schemes operating in the EU.

In May 2006, we held a Stakeholder Hearing in Brussels, which helped us to understand the vast complexity, the great opportunities, but also some of the problems presented by the evolution of food quality certification schemes.

It is in this context that Commissioner Fischer Boel asked DG Agriculture and Rural Development to organise this conference. We have brought together the broadest possible range of stakeholders and experts to discuss and debate how we can reconcile the various interests in the most effective way.

I am therefore delighted that this conference has attracted so many participants from the 27 EU Member States, and from quite a number of third countries. I want to particularly welcome the European Commissioner for Health, Markos Kyprianou, the Honourable Member of the European Parliament, Jan Mulder, and the Agriculture Minister of Germany, who is our President-in-Council, Horst Seehofer.

I would also like to welcome the representatives of many stakeholder groups that have followed our invitation to attend.

Let me shortly explain the structure of the conference. After the keynote speeches, I would like to invite some questions from the floor for our Panel. We then take lunch in the Hotel, after which, there will be four parallel workshops. These cover Economics, EU rules, International aspects and an in-depth look at different certification schemes.

Tomorrow morning the rapporteurs for each of the four workshops will present the Plenary with the results of each meeting. After that, we hope to have time for discussion and questions to the rapporteurs. Representatives of the main stakeholder groups will then come together in a panel discussion to give us their views on the issues raised during the conference. Finally, Commissioner Fischer Boel will summarise what we have heard at the conference and present this to you in the form of concluding remarks.

Throughout the conference, I hope you will take the opportunity to visit the Quality Food Fair, which has been set up outside of this conference room and upstairs where coffee is served. This is an opportunity to collect information on various food quality initiatives and to engage in direct discussions with their operators. The quality food fair will remain open throughout the

conference and you will have a chance to visit before and after the sessions as well as during the coffee breaks.

This evening, the German Presidency will kindly host a reception. This will take place at the dinner venue, the *Concert Noble*, to which transport is provided. Our caterers have also made an effort, within the budgetary limits of our Directorate General, to provide a number of products at lunch and at dinner that are registered as protected designations of origin and protected geographical indications.

So whether in debate or in sustenance, we intend to maintain your focus on quality schemes and quality products. It is too early to say bon appetite, but can I wish you an excellent conference.

Thank you.

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Now I would like to call the host for the Conference, the European Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development Mrs. Fischer Boel to deliver her keynote address.