

**EFFAT**

EUROPEAN FEDERATION OF FOOD, AGRICULTURE AND TOURISM TRADE UNIONS

## NEWS FROM EFFAT

**For immediate release**

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### **Food & drink companies should not use the current crisis to water down their social and environmental responsibilities**

Action to address climate change is high on the agenda of the European trade union movement. EFFAT's priorities include maintaining the highest possible environmental standards for working people and their families. Trade unions have a duty to play an active role in tackling the problems caused by climate change. Climate change is no longer the sole preserve of environmental experts: it affects both citizens and workers, and the practical implications for workplaces must also be addressed in social dialogue and collective bargaining.

European representatives from food, drink and tobacco sector trade unions have met to discuss the challenges of climate change and have drawn up the first directions for a comprehensive assessment of the impact of climate change on workplaces and workers in the food and drink sector.

Indeed, there are few industries where jobs are affected by climate change so directly in the short and medium-term as the agro-food sector, since its production depends directly on climatic factors. Access to raw materials is crucial to the sustainability of the agro-food sector. With food, feed and fuel now competing for access to raw materials, it is clear that the food industry will have to adapt to new parameters. Rising prices, the use of alternative materials, increased innovation, business adaptation and relocation of production facilities are some of the consequences of the new deal.

Guest speakers from Danone and Tereos presented company initiatives aimed at eliminating their production-related carbon footprint by improving production processes and establishing active sustainability policies worldwide, as well as food company strategies designed to seize new market opportunities by expanding activities to biofuel production. Anne Panneels, from the ETUC, presented cross-sectoral strategies being implemented by the European trade union movement to address the challenges for workers and workplaces of EU climate change initiatives.

The participants reminded management representatives that companies were ignoring major future shifts in public opinion and were too focused on short-term financial objectives. As a result, the short-term adaptation of companies' strategies and production processes will have a dramatic impact on workplaces and workers, with little if any compensation.

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The participants agreed that radical changes were unavoidable and that, although climate change was jeopardising some companies and some workplaces, it could also offer new opportunities. EFFAT Secretary General Harald Wiedenhofer said: "The effects of climate change on employment and social cohesion are now important issues on the trade union agenda. Public policies needed to combat climate change, as well as companies' strategies to make it a business opportunity, will inevitably have an impact on the jobs, working conditions and incomes of food workers. For that reason, the social partners must be involved. Workers and their representatives must be involved in the negotiation and implementation of energy and climate policies within the sectors, in companies and workplaces, at national and EU level, and through European Works Councils (EWCs)."

Against the backdrop of the ongoing financial and economical crisis, a review of current and planned restructuring plans throughout Europe highlighted the need to remind food and drink companies of their social responsibilities. Ole Wehlast, newly elected president of the EFFAT Food Board, stressed that "companies should not use the crisis as an excuse for initiating abusive restructuring policies", adding: "They should instead look beyond the current situation and develop plans to bridge the current difficulties, keep and train employees and continue their projects, so that they can anticipate and successfully respond to future demand and trends."

**\*ENDS\***

**Note to Editors:**

EFFAT represents the interests of more than 2.6 million members, affiliated to 118 national trade unions in 38 European countries in agriculture, food production and tourism.

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