IFPA Convenes Global Executive Leaders at Berlin Summit

International Fresh Produce Association (IFPA) held its annual Executive Leadership Summit (ELS) in Berlin on February 6. The invitation- only event, held in conjunction with Fruit Logistica, welcomed more than 120 executive leadership from 24 countries to discuss the major issues facing the industry today.

“The global trends and tides that our industry faces are having more of an impact on the global supply chain than ever before,” said IFPA Chief Membership Officer, Miriam Wolk. “Bringing together this group of leaders is such a transformative moment for the year, allowing our industry to spend time connecting and learning about the big picture issues that are defining the global economy. With this knowledge, our industry is better prepared to drive our success on a global scale.”

The schedule was designed to take on some of the hottest issues facing our global industry and included panels on fresh produce packaging and emerging global regulations and global industry trends. The interactive agenda takeaways include:

- Geopolitical concerns jump to the top of the list of concerns. It is no secret that the world is

volatile right now. Whether it is trade regulations, international conflict, or extreme weather events – the global supply chain is dealing with unpredictable headwinds. Panelists discussed major examples like the disruption in the Red Sea, growing population in the Middle East leading to container planning difficulties for shipping and production shortages caused by climate change.

- AI can be a solution – if we make sure it's not our biggest challenge. Everyone talking about the future is talking about AI. The panelists and in discussions amongst leaders, not only did the discussion revolve around possible solutions AI can provide but also the challenges ahead as well. On one hand, AI could be a huge unlock for administrative or operational work like budgets and forward planning. It may also be able to help identify patterns across the global supply chain to create more accurate forecasts. On the other hand, we must truly remember the power and value of personal contact and prepare for the level of governance needed to ensure we can stay in control of our AI efforts.
- Transformative change in packaging is needed but can't sacrifice safety. It is very clear that transformative change is needed regarding packaging. While overall reduction and innovative approaches decrease our environmental impact are critical – the Summit attendees acknowledged that we can't sacrifice public health or product quality to do so. One of the most important parts of the solution is education for consumers and policy makers alike. The industry must be committed to helping the public understand the role and challenges in addressing sustainable packaging efforts.
- Setting the trends will be critical because reacting has us on our back foot. Panelists from ICA Sweden and Spinneys joined IFPA's Miriam Wolk to discuss Global Industry Trends for 2024. One of the prevailing sentiments was the industry's need to start setting trends instead of always responding to them. We expect to see consumers asking about where their food is coming from more and more with an emphasis on wanting to feel closer to the origin of their food. We're also seeing higher engagement on social media and our consumers are learning and changing their relationships to cost and value. There's also firm belief in nudging – not telling – about the benefit of produce. There's greater value in putting produce everywhere, as opposed to just telling consumers that it should be in their cart.

"From packaging regulations to AI, the industry is being faced with many new challenges that will continue to develop with or without our input," said IFPA's Chief Science Officer, Max Teplitski, PhD. "As an industry we must choose to play an engaged role in the development of these major issues to ensure our needs are understood and considered, and our ability to contribute to big solutions is recognized. The Executive Leadership Summit is an excellent way to kick off the industry's commitment to transforming the Global Supply Chain each year."