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Belgian food and drinks more popular than ever in the United Kingdom

Brussels, 6 May 2022 – In the wake of Brexit, Belgian food and drinks are doing better than ever in the United Kingdom, even outperforming products from our neighbouring countries. From 8 through 12 May, some thirty Belgian food companies will be joining HRH Princess Astrid on a mission to the UK in a bid to maximise the growth potential of the British market. For starters, the “Best of Belgium” page on Ocado, Britain’s biggest food web shop, is a great opportunity for online sales and acts to strengthen the image of Belgian food and drinks among British consumers.

First Brexit phase neatly absorbed

Belgian food and drink exports to the United Kingdom rose by 33% compared to 2019. With the UK no longer part of the European Union, the country now ranks as the premier overseas export destination for Belgian food and beverages, accounting for 10% of our exports and representing 2.89 billion euros in turnover in 2022. Drinks, both alcoholic and non-alcoholic, recorded the strongest growth last year. In addition, our prepared vegetables and fruit, that is to say our Belgian chips in particular, along with our cereal and dairy products are in high demand.

The fact that Belgian food companies did a good job of absorbing the effects of Brexit is testament to how well prepared they were to deal with the import requirements that came into effect after Brexit. In part thanks to the intensive awareness campaigns run by the competent government bodies in association with Fevia, Belgian food companies have turned out to be better prepared to comply with these new requirements than their counterparts in our neighbouring countries. Since 1 January 2021, food companies that export their wares to the UK are required to submit customs declarations. Some vegetable products and animal by-products also already need to be pre-registered with the British food safety system.

Digital certification postponed until optimised

Starting from July, further import requirements and checks are scheduled to follow. On 28 April however, the British government decided to postpone the introduction of these measures. The government’s aim is to have a “digital border” in place by late 2023. By that time, sanitary and phytosanitary certificates too should be allowed to be supplied in digital format.

The main item on Fevia's agenda is to ensure smooth-paced trade with the UK. The certification requirements will involve a substantial added workload and added costs for our food companies. Which is why Fevia believes the British government made the right decision in postponing the introduction of these requirements until digital certification is fully optimised and the British, European and Belgian systems have been properly aligned.

Belgian products in the spotlight at Ocado web shop

The corona crisis has given online food and drink sales a major lift in the UK: British consumers currently already buy 15% of their food and drinks online. Ocado, the largest pureplay online food retailer in the UK, saw its sales go up by 31% since the corona pandemic. As part of the trade mission headed up by the Princess, Fevia, Green Seed UK marketing agency and British importers Buckley & Beale are set to sign a statement of intent with Ocado on the launch of the "Best of Belgium" web page.

In addition to a wide number of other food products and beverages, the perennial Belgian classics that are beer, chocolate and biscuits have been embraced to become staples among British consumers. This explains why it is these very "Belgian classics" that will be showcased on the "Best of Belgium" page on Ocado, which will be going live later on this year. In starting out, the page will be selling about 50 products from Belgian food companies. After the pilot phase, the page is to be gradually expanded. Branded as "Food.be - Small country. Great food.", the page will act to further strengthen the image of Belgian food and drinks in the UK.

Belgian and British food associations are partners for growth

Some thirty agri-food companies are joining HRH Princess Astrid on the economic mission to the UK, thereby making the agri-food sector the second largest group as part of the delegation. Fevia is organising a high-level seminar on "British-Belgian trade in food & beverages," which will be attended by the Princess and the federal and regional ministers. At the seminar, Fevia CEO Bart Buysse and Dominic Goudie, the Trade Director of the British Food & Drink Federation, will testify that food companies on either side of the Channel are determined to continue and deepen their good trade relations in the post-Brexit era. Fevia members are also set to head into the city of London for a retail tour, where they will be looking into which British supermarket chains offer the biggest potential for their food and drinks.

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About Fevia

Fevia, the federation of the Belgian food industry, represents 27 sub-sectors and 700 businesses that produce high quality food and drink in Belgium. The food sector is the undisputed leader of the overall Belgian manufacturing industry in terms of employment and turnover. Providing direct employment for 95,000 workers and accounting for a further 111,000 spin-off jobs, the sector effects 55 billion euros in turnover, of which 27 billion euros derives from export sales. Fevia is committed to the sustainable growth of the Belgian food industry in concert with all stakeholders. In fielding the “Food.be – Small country. Great food.” brand, the sector showcases the quality, diversity and innovation of Belgian food around the globe.

About the food companies joining the mission

For a full list of the food companies taking part in the mission, including their contact details, please go to www.food.be/belgian-economic-mission-united-kingdom.