

## Food and drink CEOs warn EU leaders over mounting competitiveness pressures

Brussels, 10 February 2026

As EU leaders gather for an [informal European Council retreat](#) on competitiveness, Europe's food and drink CEOs draw attention to the growing pressures confronting the continent's largest manufacturing sector.

In a recent survey of food and drink CEOs from 49 large companies and 28 SMEs across 13 EU member states, leaders warn of rising global competition and trade disruptions. Over one-third report worsening business conditions in Europe, while 60% lack confidence that EU rules support both sustainability and competitiveness. Business leaders say that different rules across the EU Single Market and persistently high costs are making it increasingly harder to operate, compete, and grow.

FoodDrinkEurope's latest [Data & Trends 2026 report](#) shows that the food and drink industry remains Europe's largest manufacturing sector, the biggest in over half the EU Member States, employing 4.8m people, and generating €300bn in value-added for Europe's economy, all the while buying some 70% of all EU farm produce and indirectly supporting 2.3m farm jobs<sup>1</sup>. Despite this economic weight, its global competitiveness is under growing pressure as competitors around the world catch up at speed.

As reiterated by FoodDrinkEurope's Director General, Dirk Jacobs: *"Europe's food and drink sector is vital and if the EU is serious about food security, sustainability, and prosperity, it must work with the industry to build a competitive and resilient agri-food chain. If Europe fails to act, the impact won't stop at factory gates but will cascade from farm to fork."*

FoodDrinkEurope urges swift action to secure the future of Europe's largest manufacturing industry. **The organisation calls on the European Commission to present a package of targeted measures, including cutting red tape; earmarking support for processing SMEs in the next EU budget; ensuring fairness in the value chain; and more.** This would give food and drink makers the confidence to invest, innovate and continue feeding Europe's future.

### Note to the editors

The full CEO survey will be published week commencing 23 February 2026. FoodDrinkEurope is the organisation of Europe's food and drink industry, the largest manufacturing sector in Europe, a leading employer and a key contributor to the economy (310,000+ companies, 99% SMEs, 4.8 million employees).

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<sup>1</sup> The EU food and drink industry: a competitiveness analysis, Wageningen Social & Economic Research, February 2025