



23 March 2020

President Ursula von der Leyen

Commissioner Janez Lenarčič - Crisis Management & European Emergency Response

Commissioner Thierry Breton - Internal Market

Commissioner Nicolas Schmit - Jobs & Social Rights

Commissioner Janusz Wojciechowski - Agriculture & Rural Development

European Commission

Wetstraat 200 rue de la Loi

1049 Brussels

Dear Madame President,

Dear Commissioners,

Priority action in relation to the Covid-19 crisis

Under normal circumstances, branded food and beverage service chains serve tens of millions of European customers across Europe every day, either for in-store consumption or through takeaway, “drive-thru” or home delivery.

In this unprecedented crisis period, the health and safety of our customers and equally of our employees is the first priority of Serving Europe member companies. We fully support the decisions of governments around Europe to restrict in-store service to customers and other measures as part of the effort to limit social interaction and contain the spread of Covid-19.

Given the integration of the European food sector, coordination at European level is essential. We support the work already carried out by the EU institutions and their recognition of the vital role of the food supply chain. The latter should be regarded as **an essential sector in all EU Member States**.

The branded food and beverage sector plays a crucial and indispensable role within the food supply chain and is relieving pressure on the grocery retail sector during this difficult period. In practice, our businesses are for the most part operated through a wide network of franchisees. It is these small and medium-sized companies that are taking the hard decisions and implementing the measures that are needed. They are also in the frontline in bearing the negative economic impact of the measures.

While a growing number of territories are insisting on the temporary closure of restaurants and food service outlets for in-store consumption, it is also the case that takeaway, “drive-thru” or home delivery often continues to be authorised under safe conditions. For this service to be possible, it is vital that **every effort is made to ensure that delivery personnel are treated as key workers** by member state authorities.

It is equally vital that supply chain logistics continue to function effectively in practice. We welcome the Commission guidelines on border management. Despite these guidelines, severe disruptions persist. We urge the Commission to insist that Member States ensure that any exceptional border restrictions aimed at controlling the movement of citizens do not negatively impinge in practice upon the free movement of goods within the European Union.

In particular, priority transit should be assured for food and food products needed to meet the daily needs of consumers across Europe, including through the food and beverage service sector.

In due course, once we have collectively conquered this challenge, it is important that we have a motivated workforce in place, ready to return to normal operations. We must address their needs now. That also means prioritising support to their employers, the food service operators.

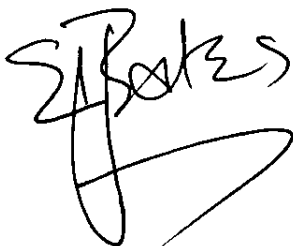
Serving Europe welcomes the coordinated response of the European Commission to counter the socio-economic impact of the coronavirus and we call for its immediate implementation in coordination with Member States. Your leadership in this regard is still needed.

We urge you to continue to encourage national governments to put in place **emergency measures to avoid unemployment and loss of income.** Such schemes must operate in a quick and straightforward manner, avoiding administrative delays. In addition to direct income support these schemes might also include deferment of social and fiscal contributions.

Income and related support to food service operators is also essential to ensure that these independent businesses survive the crisis and are able to serve consumers and provide jobs again when society starts to return to normal.

It is crucial to act now and to continue to act in these vital areas to mitigate the impact of this unprecedented crisis and help ensure a fast and smooth recovery when it is over. We remain committed to support and coordinate with the European Commission in order to manage this situation under the best conditions possible in the circumstances.

Yours sincerely,



Eamonn Bates,
Secretary General