

## **Sustainable, Responsible, Competitive: Aspirations for the Future**

Written by Tim Brett on 3 September 2019 in Opinion Plus  
Opinion Plus

Tim Brett outlines the soft drinks industry's ambition to advance environmental sustainability, healthy diets and economic growth within a strong single market.



*Photo credit: UNESDA Soft Drinks Europe*

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As an industry we feel the pulse of millions of consumers across the EU who enjoy our drinks daily.

This helps us appreciate the importance of staying ahead of changing consumer and societal expectations and informs our aspirations for the upcoming EU legislative period, which can be summed-up in just three words: Sustainable, Responsible, Competitive.

Importantly, our aspirations echo the priorities of the entire food and drink industry.

They set clear, transparent and specific goals to which we hold ourselves accountable and which are achievable within a strong single market with an enabling policy environment.

We firmly believe that partnership is key to progress and, as the next parliamentary term begins, look forward to working with EU institutions and all stakeholders in supporting effective, evidence-based policymaking.

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Europe is leading the way in transitioning towards a circular economy and EU institutions have deservedly been recognised for their efforts.

We fully support this circular vision and believe our sector can play a meaningful role in accelerating change.

This starts by making our packaging more sustainable.

Our companies have been instrumental in implementing effective collection schemes in many EU member states and we are now focused on further boosting collection, recycling and reuse of our bottles and cans.

A pressing priority is ensuring that food-grade quality recycled plastic is available, accessible and affordable and we will continue to participate in initiatives such as the Circular Plastics Alliance.

Because sustainable business operations transcend packaging alone, we remain focused on driving sustainability throughout our value chain – from production through to distribution and sales.

We have taken significant steps to reduce energy and raw material use and equally recognise the importance of ensuring sustainable sourcing and agricultural practices.

A strong Europe demands a healthy society and our industry wants to help make the healthy choice the easy choice.

“Our aspirations for the upcoming EU legislative period, [which] can be summed-up in just three words: Sustainable, Responsible, Competitive”

Our members have made notable progress in reducing added sugars in their drinks and increasing the availability of no- and low-calorie beverages.

These now represent a quarter of all soft drink sales across Europe.

We are committed to growing this number and delivering on our pledge to reduce added sugars by a further 10 percent by 2020.

I'm a firm believer that self-regulation can deliver on policy objectives more effectively and more

swiftly than relying solely on government regulation.

A great example of this lies in our organisation's commitment to schools.

We stopped selling all soft drinks in EU primary schools in 2006 and last year removed all added-sugar drinks from secondary schools – a pledge reaching more than 50,000 schools and 40 million schoolchildren.

We are taking meaningful actions as a sector, but we need other partners from industry and beyond to join the journey.

Scale is key to creating healthier food environments.

“A strong Europe demands a healthy society and our industry wants to help make the healthy choice the easy choice”

Our sector has been rooted in the European economy for more than a century, and today spans the length and breadth of the EU.

With farmers, producers, retailers and restaurant owners, we are proud to support jobs, growth and prosperity across our €185 billion value-chain.

Moving forward, we believe we are well-placed to strongly contribute to Europe's economic growth and support a competitive, strong single market and a fiscal policy environment that is fair, non-discriminatory and predictable.

Fragmentation or renationalisation of EU policies could compromise progress and constrain the contribution of industries such as ours.

While we progress, we recognise there is much still to be done. Our 2019-2024 aspirations capture the determination, passion and optimism of our members.

We look forward to partnering with policymakers to ensure we meet the goals and expectations we set and advance our Sustainable, Responsible and Competitive sector.

### **About the author**



Tim Brett is President of UNESDA Soft Drinks Europe and President of Coca-Cola Western Europe

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