

## Annual report 2024 on the EU Code of Conduct on Responsible Food Business and Marketing Practices

### General information

<b>Name in full + acronym</b>	Independent Retail Europe
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<b>N° in the transparency register</b>	034546859-02
<b>Date of signature of the Code</b>	5 July 2021
<b>Step of the food chain represented (ex.: primary production, production, processing, trade, retail...)</b>	Groups of independent SME retailers and national associations of local retailers in both the food and non-food sectors
<b>Who do you represent? (e.g. number of members, companies, SMEs)</b>	Through our 24 member groups and associations, we represent around 466.500 independent retailers managing nearly 745.000 points of sale and employing more than 6,4 million people in the EU.

### Independent Retail Europe's pledges:

#### Endorse the aspirational objectives set out in this Code (where applicable)

As a drafting organization and one of the first signatories to the Code, Independent Retail Europe fully endorses the Code by supporting its aspirational objectives, informing and engaging our membership on the Code.

#### Promote and disseminate this Code with(in) our constituency/ies

We regularly inform our members about the Code of Conduct through our monthly newsletter. Being a member of the Liaison Group of the Code offers an opportunity to be frequently in contact with the Commission, to demonstrate that members engage actively in sustainability measures, and to advocate for support measures (enablers) for members to help them meet their sustainability objectives. It also enables us to be early in the loop of any new EU developments in the agri-food area. In the context of the Liaison Group, we have organized several events in 2023 on different aspects of the Code of Conduct, e.g.

- A thematic session on sustainable packaging where we shared our experience and ideas to further strive towards improved sustainability of food and drink packaging on 21<sup>st</sup> July 2023 (Objective 4).

- The workshop “Scaling up the sustainable transition with agri-food SMEs” on 27 November 2023, where we showcased sustainable practices of SMEs, and addressed their challenges in greening their operations (Objectives 2, 3, 6 and 7).
- On 12<sup>th</sup> September 2024, another workshop will be held addressing the efforts of member organizations to ensure sustainable sourcing and traceability to fulfil of the Code of Conduct (Objective 7).

We also participated in the annual Collaborative Platform Meetings organized by the European Commission.

In addition, sustainability activities were a key part of presentations shown during our Annual Conferences and other events organized:

- In our Annual Conference in Rome on 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> March 2024, we heard a presentation by DG Grow on the new EU Retail Transition Pathway that will be vital to ensure a smooth digital and green transition and a resilient retail sector. We also discussed the positive role of independent traders within local communities, including their role to bring forward local sustainable sourcing (Objectives 5, 6 and 7).
- During our celebration of our 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary on 15<sup>th</sup> November 2023, we discussed how independent retail is an integral part of a sustainable economy showcasing examples of the promotion of local products, repair services, food waste prevention, recycling and energy efficiency (Objectives 2, 3 and 4).
- The “contribution of sustainability as a means to continued growth” was one of the main headlines of our Annual Conference in Copenhagen on 16<sup>th</sup> March 2023. We organized a session “Towards a circular and greener future” where we heard presentation on “Sustainability as a cornerstone of growth”, “The power of the consumer towards technical consumers goods and sustainability” and the initiative “Too Good to Go” against food waste (Objectives 2, 3 and 4).

**Encourage our members to align their sustainability actions and/or business practices to the aspirational objectives and targets of the Code and invite them, on a voluntary basis, to adhere to this Code, as appropriate**

Through our monthly newsletter and internal meetings, we encourage our members to integrate the aspirational goals of the Code of Conduct in their business models thus driving the green transition. They support the objectives of the Code by stepping up the fight against food waste (Objective 2), by collecting and recycling and using recycled packaging (Objective 4), by adapting portion sizes (Objective 2), by reformulating their private label products to reduce salt, sugar and fat (Objective 1), by responding to consumer demand for higher standards in animal welfare and by sourcing responsibly (Objective 7) and by investing in greener operations through the installations of solar panels, e-chargers in parking lots and electronic fleets (Objective 3). In order to meet and stimulate growing demand for sustainable, organic and local products, our members have launched initiatives all over Europe to support local suppliers in moving to organic, in marketing they produce and in providing training on sustainable practices (Objectives 6 and 7). While some of our members have consequently signed up to the Code, many SME retailers do not see an added value in the Code as it does not provide for any additional financial support for their self-evident sustainability efforts but imposes further reporting requirements.

The promotion of sustainability, consumer health and safety, and protection of the environment is furthermore a key part of our manifesto for the next European legislature.

### **Explore the possibility of developing sector-specific tools and resources in support of this Code**

We share best-practice examples in the area of sustainability of our members on our homepage. Under our category [“Retailers for Sustainability”](#), a long list of project examples from different members can be found that enhance environmental, economic and social sustainability.

The organization of our membership events furthermore allows members to showcase their experiences in the use of different tools to improve their carbon footprint and to contribute to more sustainable local communities. Through our newsletter we inform members about toolkits of the European Commission to reduce consumer food waste, about initiatives such as the EU Ecolabel and financial support opportunities such as the Funding and Tenders Portal.

### **Continue to engage in dialogue with other food chain/systems actors and EU and international policy-makers to forge (new) relationships, exchange good practices and discuss challenges encountered, learn from each other (studies, projects) and create better mutual understanding, and identify opportunities for collaboration and potential partnership**

Building alliances on issues of common interest is not only necessary to leverage resources, it is also of paramount importance to show that a position is shared by a wide set of economic operators across the food chain. We regularly engage with other parts of the chain in the context of the Liaison Group and the EU advisory/expert groups. We invite other parts of the chain to contribute to our conferences, e.g. the inter-professional organisation of the supply chain “Ortofrutta Italia” who explained their collaboration mechanism between producers, farmers and distributors at our annual conference in Rome. We also took the initiative to engage with fellow stakeholders (Objective 6):

- We actively contributed to the development of the Transition Pathway for Retail, that will be vital to ensure a smooth digital and green transition and a resilient retail sector. The Pathway dedicates a separate chapter to SME retail and will be an important tool to promote the goals of the Code of Conduct.
- Throughout the mandate, we were active in addressing issues affecting food retailers' relationships with large suppliers and farmers. We participated as panellist during a conference organized in the European Parliament by the European network of agricultural journalists and during the 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting of the Forum on Best Practices in the Agri-Food Supply Chain organised by the EU CAP Network (a network set up by the European Commission bringing together civil servants from EU and national administrations, researchers and stakeholder organisations). Lastly, we became a member of and actively participated in the European Food Security Crisis Preparedness and Response Mechanism (EFSCM), an EU expert group bringing together stakeholders, EU Member States representatives and the Commission to support resilience in the food chain.
- We are member of the Advisory Group on the Sustainability of Food Systems (AGSFS). The group is kept informed about all EU initiatives related to the Farm to Fork Strategy. Several consultations were held on the issue, to which we responded.

- Since its inauguration in 2016, we are member of the Platform on Food Waste. The platform brings together EU Member States, international organisations, and representatives from the private sector and from consumer associations in order to exchange best practices and develop guidelines on how to avoid food waste in the different sectors. Specifically, we are members of the Task Forces on Food Donation and of the Task Force on Date Marking, to assist the Commission with finding the best solutions for understandable date marking to avoid unnecessary food wastage. In 2023, we participated in a panel discussion with European citizens on the recommendations made by the European Citizens' Food Waste Panel.
- On 17<sup>th</sup> June 2024, we joined the EU Agrifood Chain observatory (AFCO). Its aim is to restore trust in the supply chain and to increase transparency on production costs, margins and transmission of value added along the food supply chain. For this purpose, it will aim to build EU indices reflecting these aspects and may also discuss trading practices.