

Ms Ursula VON DER LEYEN
President of the European Commission
European Commission
Rue de la Loi / Wetstraat 200
1049 Brussels
Belgium

Brussels, 04 March 2021

Dear President von der Leyen,

On behalf of the European consumer co-operative movement and the European groups of independent retailers, please accept our wishes for a more prosperous and healthier 2021.

We believe that our two associations' national members can also contribute to making it a more favourable year. That is why we are addressing you with a proposal regarding the COVID-19 vaccination strategy.

Together, Euro Coop and Independent Retail Europe represent 27 national networks of consumer co-operatives and groups of independent retailers throughout the Continent, which unite 400,000 local enterprises, operate 800,000 stores and invest into 7.3 million jobs. Most of all, we serve 95 million consumers daily, of whom 35 million are also the owners and equal shareholders of Euro Coop businesses due to the co-op model of ownership and governance.

Groups of independent retailers and consumer co-operatives are prominent throughout the Union, with a particularly active role in rural areas and small towns.

As Europe braces to mitigate the once-in-a-generation crisis, consumer co-operatives and groups of independent retailers support the ones in need and maintain their mission to serve the people. Keeping our stores open and employing incredible flexibility in our operations, we succeeded in offering our 95 million consumers in their many thousands of local communities across the whole of the EU an uninterrupted shopping opportunity in an otherwise heavily restricted daily routine. Our 7.3 million employees find themselves on the frontline, by keeping the people supplied with food. This makes the work of the food retail sector a systemically important task. The employees are doing an incredible job, not only by ensuring the supply of goods, but also in direct customer contact. We owe them a great deal.

However, the current wave of the epidemic is affecting an increasing number of staff which is pushing more stores to close.

For these reasons, on behalf of Europe's consumer co-operatives and groups of independent retailers, our plea to you is to consider making a formal proposal to the Member States to reference retail employees in the priority groups pursuant to their national vaccination strategic plans, so that, as soon as the priority risk groups have been cared for, they can get vaccinated as soon as possible.

This will allow them to continue to do what they do best: serving customers.

President, we believe that together we can contribute to a more favourable development in these extraordinary times. That is why we express our readiness to explore the potential for co-operation and mutual support.

We remain at your disposal for further coordination.

Once again, please accept our warmest considerations and wishes for a successful 2021.

Your sincerely,



Todor Ivanov
Secretary-General
Euro Coop



Else Groen
Director General
Independent Retail Europe