



2025 Brussels Conference Report





The Future of Wholesale Markets: Leadership, Performance and Transition.”

2

Brussels, Belgium
5-7 November 2025



Foreword

3 It is my honour to present this report following the 42nd WUWM Conference, held in Brussels from 5 to 7 November 2025 under the theme "The Future of Wholesale Markets: Leadership, Performance and Transition." Bringing together nearly 200 delegates from more than 30 countries, this Congress provided a unique opportunity to exchange experiences, strengthen international cooperation and reaffirm the strategic role of wholesale markets in addressing the profound transformations affecting global food systems.

Hosting this conference in Brussels, the political heart of Europe, carried a strong symbolic significance. It highlighted the growing recognition of wholesale markets as essential infrastructures for food sovereignty, urban resilience and sustainable economic development. Throughout three days of discussions, participants explored the major challenges facing our sector from geopolitical instability and climate change to digital transformation, artificial intelligence and the growing need to feed expanding urban populations. The exchanges demonstrated that wholesale markets are evolving beyond their traditional trading role to become strategic platforms connecting producers, distributors, consumers and public authorities.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to our Belgian hosts, Mabru Wholesale Market, and in particular to Sevkem Temiz, Laurent Nys, their teams and all our partners for their outstanding commitment in organising this successful conference. My thanks also go to all our speakers, delegates and sponsors whose expertise and engagement made these discussions so rich and constructive. The momentum generated in Brussels will continue to guide WUWM's work as we strengthen cooperation, foster innovation and reinforce the role of wholesale markets as indispensable pillars of food security and sustainable development across the world.

Stéphane Layani
Chairman, World Union
of Wholesale Markets

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Stéphane Layani', with a stylized, flowing script.



Executive Summary

4

From 5 to 7 November 2025, the World Union of Wholesale Markets (WUWM) gathered nearly 200 delegates from more than 30 countries in Brussels for its annual conference, organized in partnership with Mabru Wholesale Market under the theme “The Future of Wholesale Markets: Leadership, Performance and Transition.” Held in the political heart of Europe, the conference reaffirmed the strategic role of wholesale markets as essential infrastructures for food sovereignty, urban resilience and sustainable economic development.

Throughout the conference, participants addressed the profound transformations currently reshaping global agrifood systems, including geopolitical instability, climate change, digital disruption, urbanisation and growing food insecurity. Wholesale markets were repeatedly described as critical connectors between producers and consumers, capable of ensuring stable, affordable and safe food supply chains in increasingly complex urban environments.

A major focus of the conference was digital transformation and the growing role of artificial intelligence in wholesale operations. Experts presented practical applications already improving forecasting, logistics, ordering systems, warehouse automation and traceability. AI-driven solutions demonstrated their potential to reduce logistics costs, improve operational efficiency and strengthen transparency across supply chains. At the same time, speakers stressed that innovation must remain human-centred, ethically regulated and fully compliant with European data protection frameworks.

The challenge of feeding megacities also occupied a central place in the discussions. Case studies from Milan, Johannesburg and Nigeria highlighted the growing importance of modern wholesale infrastructures in supporting rapidly expanding urban populations. Delegates emphasized the need for stronger cooperation between wholesale markets, public authorities and logistics operators, alongside investments in rail freight, digital infrastructure, local sourcing systems and secondary urban distribution hubs.

Social responsibility and food waste reduction emerged as another key theme. Initiatives such as the DREAM project (Distribution et Récupération d'Excédents Alimentaires à Mabru) in Brussels and the ANDES-SOS network at Rungis illustrated how wholesale markets can transform unsold produce into valuable food resources for vulnerable populations while reducing environmental impact. Delegates advocated replacing the notion of "food waste" with "food resource management," based on prevention, redistribution and circular economy principles.

Sustainability and energy transition were equally central to the debates. Markets such as Brussels, Bologna, Barcelona and Johannesburg showcased investments in solar energy, refrigeration efficiency and sustainable logistics systems. Wholesale markets were increasingly presented not only as food hubs, but also as future energy hubs contributing to urban resilience and environmental transition.

The Brussels conference concluded with a renewed commitment from WUWM members to strengthen international cooperation, accelerate innovation and reinforce the recognition of wholesale markets within public policies. Delegates collectively reaffirmed that wholesale markets are no longer simple trading platforms, but strategic infrastructures at the crossroads of food security, sustainability, economic performance and social cohesion.





Table of Contents

6

3	Foreword
4	Executive Summary
7	Welcome Ceremony
14	Working Sessions
15	Session 1. Digital Transformation and Innovation in Wholesale Markets
21	Session 2. Supplying Megacities in Times of Economic Change: New Challenges for Wholesale Markets
27	Session 3. Food Donation: A Key Strategy for Sustainable Food Systems
31	Awards Ceremony
32	2025 WUWM Manager of the Year: Eder Eduardo Bublitz, CEO of Ceasa Paraná, Brazil
33	Special Jury Recognition: Sello Makhubela, CEO of Joburg Market, South Africa
34	Conclusion
37	Speakers, Sponsors & Partners

Welcome Ceremony



Welcome speech of David Clarinval, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Agriculture of Belgium

The 42nd Congress of the World Union of Wholesale Markets was officially opened by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Agriculture **David Clarinval** in Brussels, at the heart of Europe. It was underlined that this was the first time the Congress had been held in Brussels a symbolic choice, as the city stands at the crossroads of cultural, political and logistical exchanges.

Laurent Nys, Managing Director of Mabru, was warmly congratulated for the initiative. The essential role of the delegates, positioned at the heart of the food supply chain between producers and consumers, was strongly emphasized. It was recalled that wholesale market professionals are key actors in ensuring food sovereignty and food security.

The major disruptions faced by the wholesale sector in recent years, including the pandemic of COVID 19, the war in Ukraine and increasingly aggressive trade policies, were highlighted. The example of Belgium was cited: with €1.2 billion of exports to the United States, customs duties

of 15% represent approximately €180 million in additional taxes, constituting a significant constraint on international trade.

At the same time, it was stressed that international turbulences can also represent an opportunity for Belgium to strengthen its position as a preferred trading and logistics platform and to enhance productivity. In conclusion, it was reaffirmed that food security and economic prosperity depend on the resilience of food supply chains.

**“ International turbulences
are an opportunity for
Belgium to prosper
as a preferred trading
and logistics platform and
to gain in productivity.”**

Mr David Clarinval

Welcome words of Stéphane Layani, WUWM Chairman and CEO of Rungis International Market

Stéphane Layani, Chairman of the World Union of Wholesale Markets and CEO of Rungis Market, welcomed participants and introduced the central theme of the Congress: **"The Future of Wholesale Markets: Leadership, Performance and Transition"**.

Warm congratulations were extended to the organising team of Mabru Market for the quality of the event and for the informative visit of Mabru market hosted earlier in the day.

In his address, it was recalled that wholesale markets occupy a central position within global food systems, with between 50 and 60% of fresh produce worldwide being distributed

// Let us reaffirm our commitment to build more efficient food supply chains, also more inclusive and resilient, to ensure no one is left hungry."

Mr Stéphane Layani

through these platforms. Their strategic role in fostering innovation, generating employment and advancing sustainability was emphasized, notably through the deployment of artificial intelligence technologies to optimize supply chains. The contribution of wholesale markets to reducing food waste and strengthening social responsibility was highlighted. It was underlined that these markets demonstrate a strong capacity to adapt to economic constraints while continuing to ensure a stable food supply to urban populations.

Participants were informed that the conference sessions would combine economic analysis with practical case studies, enabling a comprehensive exchange of expertise and experience. Attention was drawn to the global food security context. It was noted that 8.2% of the world's population, approximately 700 million people, experienced hunger in 2024, and that food insecurity remains higher than before the pandemic. While progress has been observed in parts of Eastern Asia and Latin America, the situation has deteriorated in Africa and Western Asia, where millions continue to face acute food crises.

In conclusion, the essential role of wholesale markets in ensuring infrastructure access and fair distribution was reaffirmed. A renewed collective commitment was expressed to build more efficient, inclusive and resilient food supply chains, with the objective of ensuring that no one is left behind in the fight against hunger.

// Wholesale markets are at the heart of innovation, employment and sustainability, such as the deployment of AI technology to optimize supply chains."

Mr Stéphane Layani





Wholesale food markets are crucial hubs
that connect farmers and food producers

Mr Qu Dongyu, Director-General of FAO, addressed his welcome words by video message

10

A video message was delivered by **Mr Qu Dongyu**, Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), in which participants were welcomed and the strategic importance of wholesale markets was underlined. It was emphasized that wholesale markets represent a key leverage point in the transformation of agrifood systems, contributing to inclusive economic prosperity, human well-being and planetary health.

Referring to the current global food security situation, he noted that 673 million people worldwide continue to face hunger, 2.3 billion experience food insecurity, and 2.6 billion lack access to healthy diets. Given that nearly three quarters of those affected live in urban areas, the critical role of wholesale food markets as central hubs connecting farmers and food producers to retailers and other businesses was highlighted. Their contribution to facilitating the supply of fresh products, reducing costs and thereby improving food security and nutrition was reaffirmed.

FAO's longstanding engagement in supporting its Members in the development and modernization of wholesale markets was recalled. This support includes the strengthening of regulatory frameworks for food quality and safety standards, as well as the promotion of innovation, notably through the use of digital technologies. Efforts to improve bulk packaging, enhance logistics operations and develop tools for measuring and reducing food loss and waste were also outlined.

**“ We live in a world where
673 million people face
hunger, 2.3 billion are food
insecure and 2.6 billion lack
access to healthy diets.”**

Mr Qu Dongyu

“ We need win-win solutions for people and the planet that are inclusive, consider the needs of vulnerable groups and are also environmentally friendly.”

Mr Qu Dongyu

In conclusion, the need for inclusive and environmentally sustainable “win-win” solutions benefiting both people and the planet was stressed, with particular attention to vulnerable groups. FAO’s commitment to further strengthening its partnership with WUWM was reaffirmed, with the shared objective of advancing the transformation of global agrifood systems in line with the principles of better production, better nutrition, better environment and a better life for all.



Rudi Vervoort, Minister-President of the Government of the Brussels-Capital Region, addressed his welcome words

11

Welcome remarks were delivered by **Mr Rudi Vervoort**, Minister-President of the Government of the Brussels-Capital Region, who highlighted the symbolic and strategic importance of hosting the 42nd WUWM Congress in Brussels. Brussels was described as both the capital of Europe and a capital of diversity, as well as a city embodying an economic model grounded in sustainability, solidarity and innovation. It was emphasized that hosting this international event represents far more than a symbolic gesture; it reflects the central role played by wholesale markets in strengthening global food security, enhancing regional resilience and maintaining stable relationships between producers, distributors and consumers.



“ Capital of Europe and capital of diversity, Brussels is also the capital of an economic model based on sustainability, solidarity and innovation.”

Mr Rudi Vervoort

The presence of Mabru, recognized as one of Europe’s leading wholesale markets and the food hub of the Brussels metropolitan area, was underlined as a source of pride for the Region. It was recalled that Mabru supplies thousands of retailers, restaurants and public institutions every morning, thereby ensuring the daily food provision of the city. Mabru was presented not only as a commercial platform, but also as a strategic public service and a safeguard of the Region’s independent food system.

Recent crises were cited as clear reminders that without a robust wholesale system, the continuity of food supply cannot be guaranteed. The essential contribution of wholesale markets to sustainability and the development of short supply chains was reaffirmed. Mabru's environmental commitment was illustrated by the installation of 26,000 solar panels contributing to the city's energy production.

In parallel, solidarity initiatives aimed at supporting people in need were highlighted, reflecting the market's broader social responsibility. Mabru was further characterized as a social, territorial and environmental actor. In light of demographic growth and climate-related challenges, the need to anticipate future crises through collective action was stressed.

In conclusion, it was affirmed that wholesale markets must be placed at the core of global food strategies, serving as platforms of the future, grounded in trust, innovation and social cohesion.

“ Brussels is also proud to be the host of Mabru, one of Europe's leading markets and the food hub of our metropolitan area.”

Mr Rudi Vervoort

Mr Sevket Temiz, Chairman of Mabru Wholesale Market, Member of the Parliament and City Councillor of Brussels

12



“ Together we will find solutions to the challenges of global food systems, ensuring that our cities continue to be well supplied with safe, high-quality and affordable food.”

Mr Sevket Temiz

An address was delivered by **Mr Sevket Temiz**, Chairman of Mabru Wholesale Market, Member of Parliament and City Councillor of Brussels, who expressed his honour in hosting the 42nd WUWM Congress in Brussels. Warm appreciation was conveyed to Chairman **Stéphane Layani** for his leadership and for his efforts in bringing together professionals from across the globe, thereby reinforcing international dialogue within the wholesale market community.

It was stated that Brussels has become a focal point for dialogue and innovation regarding the future of wholesale markets. The importance of collective action in addressing the challenges facing global food systems was emphasized, with particular reference to ensuring that cities remain reliably supplied with safe, high-quality and affordable food.

The central themes of food security, food safety, supply chain resilience and the ongoing evolution of global food systems were identified as key pillars of the Congress discussions. In closing, participants were encouraged to engage in constructive exchanges, to foster meaningful partnerships and to enjoy a productive and memorable stay in Brussels.

Mr Laurent Nys, General Manager of Mabru, WUWM Member and European Group Leader

Mr Laurent Nys, General Manager of Mabru, WUWM Member and European Group Leader, expressed his sincere appreciation for the presence of participants from across Europe and around the world. He underlined that the strong international participation clearly reflects the importance of the shared mission of wholesale markets, the collective commitment of WUWM members and the vitality of the WUWM network.

Mr Laurent Nys presented the Congress as a valuable platform for dialogue and exchange, offering participants an opportunity to share experiences, strengthen cooperation and collectively contribute to improving the food system of tomorrow.

Special thanks were extended to all delegates and speakers for their active contribution to the programme. Appreciation was also conveyed to the Mabru team, the WUWM team, organizers, hostesses whose dedication and professionalism made the event possible. It was noted that more than one year of preparation and coordinated effort had been required to bring the Congress to fruition.

“ Your participation from all around the world is a clear demonstration of the importance of our mission, our shared commitment and the vitality of our network.”

Mr Laurent Nys



Working Sessions

Session 1. Digital Transformation and Innovation in Wholesale Markets

The first session focused on the accelerating digital transformation of wholesale markets and the emergence of artificial intelligence, smart logistics and traceability technologies as strategic tools for the future of food distribution. Speakers from academia, technology companies, wholesale markets and international organisations explored how innovation can improve operational efficiency, strengthen transparency and enhance the sustainability of agrifood supply chains. The session highlighted that wholesale markets are entering a decisive transition period in which digital infrastructure, data management and energy performance are becoming as strategic as physical logistics infrastructures.

Efficiency Unleashed: Artificial Intelligence in the Future of Wholesale Markets

Speaker: Professor Rudy Aernoudt - Ghent and Nancy Universities

15

Professor Rudy Aernoudt opened the session by presenting the rapid evolution of artificial intelligence technologies and their growing application within logistics and wholesale distribution. AI was described not as “real

intelligence,” but as a machine capable of reproducing certain cognitive functions through machine learning, deep learning and generative AI systems. He emphasized that AI is already deeply integrated into wholesale operations worldwide.

“ The question with Artificial Intelligence and logistics is how fast shall we use it.”

Pr Rudy Aernoudt



According to recent estimates, 83% of wholesale distributors are already using AI-based solutions, while the market for logistics IT solutions and warehouse automation now represents tens of billions of euros globally. AI applications currently include:

- demand forecasting,
- procurement optimisation,
- dynamic pricing,
- warehouse automation,
- predictive inventory management,
- and supplier responsiveness.

Operational gains presented during the session included:

- 30% improvement in forecasting accuracy,
- 18% faster supplier response times,
- 50% higher warehouse picking efficiency,
- and substantial reductions in logistics and procurement costs.

Several international case studies illustrated the practical impact of AI technologies. Alibaba's deployment of 750,000 warehouse robots significantly increased productivity, while Amazon reduced delivery times and stock shortages through AI-supported logistics systems. Other examples included AI-driven pricing systems in aviation and automated inventory drones used by logistics companies.

At the same time, **Professor Aernoudt** warned against the risks associated with poor-quality data, opaque "black box" algorithms and ethical concerns linked to privacy and regulation. He recommended that wholesale markets adopt AI progressively by:

- focusing first on one operational function,
- ensuring strong data quality,
- defining measurable ROI indicators,
- and combining internal expertise with external technology providers.

Digital Transformation in European Wholesale Markets: Practical Case Studies

Speaker: Michael Putz (Orderlion, Austria)

Michael Putz presented practical examples of how AI and digital ordering systems are transforming the daily operations of wholesalers and their customers. Orderlion's digital platform aims to simplify and automate ordering processes between wholesalers, restaurants and supermarkets. He explained that labour shortages, early working hours and manual order

management continue to create inefficiencies, delays and unnecessary food waste throughout the supply chain. Two concrete case studies were presented:

→ **Keith Mawby (United Kingdom)**

A digital webshop and ordering application enabled restaurant customers to place orders independently online. The result was:

- 8 hours of labour saved daily,
- 75% of orders processed online,
- and a 90% increase in revenue supported by AI-driven recommendations and digital marketing tools.



“ I see a lot of potential with AI saving time for your employees and relocating resources for other work.”

Mr Michael Putz

→ Foodex (Italy)

An “AI Inbox” solution was implemented to automatically process supermarket orders received via emails, WhatsApp messages or voice communications. More than 2,500 monthly orders are now processed automatically with:

- ▶ 70% fewer errors,
- ▶ and processing times reduced to one-tenth of previous levels.

Mr Putz stressed that AI should not replace human relationships but rather free staff from repetitive administrative tasks, allowing them to focus on higher-value commercial interactions.



On stage, next to the presenter Jennifer Martin (from left to right): Yasmine Salehy, Quentin Ramon, Leo Cheung, Nicolas Winter, Huang Jingsheng and Michael Putz.

Building a Global Digital Supply Chain Ecosystem for Agricultural Products

Speaker: Huang Jingsheng (Guangdong Caiding Holdings Group, China)

Huang Jingsheng presented the rapid digital transformation undertaken by Guangdong Caiding Holding Group, one of China's leading agrifood technology companies. Established in 2013, Caiding has developed more than 150 projects combining wholesale markets, digital commerce and supply chain technologies. He

identified three major challenges currently affecting wholesale markets:

- ▶ information asymmetry,
- ▶ inefficient management systems,
- ▶ and competition from online distribution platforms.

To address these challenges, Guangdong Caiding Holding Group has developed three strategic digital tools:

→ **Smart Market Management Systems**

Real-time monitoring systems improve operational efficiency and market management.

→ **Caiding Price Index**

Big data analysis provides accurate and transparent price references across the supply chain.

→ **Merchant Empowerment Tools**

Digital dashboards, smart cash systems and inventory management tools support wholesalers in improving operational performance.

Mr Huang Jingsheng emphasized that future wholesale markets must evolve into integrated digital ecosystems where markets, merchants, suppliers and consumers are interconnected through data-sharing platforms.



“ The future of wholesale markets lies not in how much we sell but in how much data we control and how many resources we connect.”

Mr Huang Jingsheng

AI and Regulatory Compliance at Rungis International Market

Speakers: Pénélope Goldsztein and Nicolas Winter (Semmaris, France)

Pénélope Goldsztein and **Nicolas Winter** presented how AI is being used at Rungis International Market to simplify administrative procedures while remaining fully compliant with European data protection regulations. The speakers stressed that AI projects must integrate:

- ▶ GDPR compliance,
- ▶ ethical safeguards,
- ▶ data security,
- ▶ and transparency principles from the outset.

Rungis developed an ethical AI charter to ensure responsible implementation and avoid misuse of personal data. A practical case study focused on the renewal process for the 25,000 buyers and 1,200 tenants operating at Rungis Market. Previously managed manually by several employees, the new AI-based system automatically extracts data from documents, verifies information, creates or renews registrations, and stores only essential administrative information. It significantly reduced administrative workload while strengthening GDPR compliance.

“ AI shall comply with GDPR regulation and ensure an ethical and responsible use of AI.”

Mrs Pénélope Goldsztein





From Farm to Future: Building Trust through Traceability

Speaker: Leo Cheung (International Growers Standards Organization - IGSO)

Leo Cheung argued that global agrifood systems currently suffer from a lack of trust, transparency and fairness. He described how excessive

“ Trust can be rebuilt, then value can grow again.”

Mr Leo Cheung



pressure on producers, wholesalers and retailers creates inefficiencies and contributes significantly to food waste. According to IGSO estimates:

- up to 12% of food produced never reaches consumers,
- while waste levels for berries and green vegetables exceed 20%.

To address these challenges, IGSO has developed a digital traceability ecosystem combining RFID technology, QR codes, certification systems, and real-time product verification. The system allows:

- origin authentication,
- temperature and logistics monitoring,
- transparent product tracking,
- and direct communication between consumers and producers.

The model is already operational in several Chinese provinces and in retail systems in Hong Kong. **Mr Cheung** emphasized that verified data is becoming a new form of economic value within agriculture and that transparency can strengthen trust throughout the supply chain.

19

Solar Energy and Wholesale Markets: From Infrastructure to Energy Hubs

Speaker: Quentin Ramon (Orka Solaire, Belgium)

Quentin Ramon demonstrated how wholesale markets possess exceptional potential to become renewable energy hubs thanks to their large roof surfaces and logistics infrastructures. The Mabru

solar installation was presented as a concrete example, with 7.586 MWp installed capacity, and 6,800 MWh annual electricity production. The challenge now lies not only in producing electricity

but also in managing surplus energy generation during peak production periods. Beyond battery storage, intelligent hardware systems can regulate production and improve flexibility according to electricity market conditions.

Mr Ramon encouraged wholesale market operators to consider energy production as a new strategic service for their ecosystems: *"Every owner of a wholesale facility has the potential to convert it into a power energy hub."*

Innovation and Sustainability in Refrigeration Technologies

Speaker: Yasmine Salehy (INRAE, France)

Yasmine Salehy addressed the environmental impact of refrigeration systems within food supply chains. Cold chain infrastructure currently represents:

- ▶ approximately 8% of global greenhouse gas emissions,
- ▶ and nearly 20% of worldwide electricity consumption.

Future challenges include:

- ▶ reducing energy consumption,
- ▶ limiting refrigerant gas leaks,
- ▶ and adopting safer, low-impact cooling fluids such as CO₂, ammonia and hydrocarbons.

She also presented innovative secondary-loop refrigeration systems using simpler cooling substances such as paraffin, ice and hydrates.

INRAE's FRISE research platform has modelled more than 300,000 possible refrigeration facility configurations to optimise environmental and operational performance. The speaker called for stronger collaboration between researchers and wholesale markets in order to accelerate innovation and facilitate technology adoption.

// The more is invested in secondary refrigeration systems, the lower the environmental impact."

Mrs Yasmine Salehy



Session 2. Supplying Megacities in Times of Economic Change: New Challenges for Wholesale Markets

The second session of the Brussels conference focused on one of the defining challenges of the coming decades: how to sustainably supply rapidly growing megacities in an increasingly unstable economic and geopolitical environment. Discussions explored the consequences of global economic disruptions, the strategic role of wholesale markets in urban food resilience, and the investments required to modernise logistics infrastructures capable of feeding large metropolitan regions. Speakers emphasized that wholesale markets are no longer simply trading spaces but essential urban infrastructures positioned at the crossroads of food sovereignty, logistics performance, environmental sustainability and social cohesion.

The Global Economic Situation Under the Trump Era: Challenge or Opportunity for Fresh Produce Distribution?

Speaker: Professor Roland Gillet

(La Sorbonne University & Free University of Brussels)

Professor Roland Gillet opened the session with a macroeconomic overview of the current global environment and its consequences for agrifood distribution systems. He recalled that since the 2008 financial crisis, economic growth has evolved asymmetrically between Europe and the United States, with the U.S. economy benefiting from stronger industrial investment policies and large domestic energy resources.

Particular attention was given to the geopolitical and economic implications of the renewed "MAGA" policies under the Trump administration, notably:

- ▶ increased customs tariffs,
- ▶ protectionist trade policies,
- ▶ currency volatility,
- ▶ and rising geopolitical instability.

Professor Gillet stressed that such policies may ultimately reduce global economic growth while fuelling inflationary pressures and uncertainty across international supply chains. For the fresh produce sector, the main responses identified included:

- ▶ strengthening local and regional supply chains,
- ▶ improving food self-sufficiency,
- ▶ accelerating digitalisation,
- ▶ and integrating blockchain and B2B e-commerce technologies.

He noted that Europe increasingly views food sovereignty not only as a strategic necessity but also as an economic opportunity. Despite current tensions, **Professor Gillet** suggested that long-term economic realities may eventually moderate aggressive trade policies.



“ On a long run Trump administration may curve their aggressive policy and be forced to maintain their credibility.”

Professor Roland Gillet



Nigeria's Path to Food Security: Subnational Innovation and the Future of Wholesale Markets

Speaker: Dr Adebowale Akande (Agribusiness and International Development Adviser, Nigeria)

22

Dr Adebowale Akande presented Nigeria's efforts to modernise its food distribution systems in response to rapid urbanisation and population growth. Major cities such as Lagos, Kano and Abuja are evolving into megacities requiring increasingly sophisticated supply infrastructures capable of guaranteeing food security, affordability and traceability. Nigeria's current food system remains largely dependent on fragmented informal markets, generating:

- inefficiencies,
- high logistics costs,
- and significant post-harvest losses.

To address these issues, Nigeria is investing in a new generation of wholesale infrastructure projects, notably the Oyo State Food Transformation Centre, which aims to become the country's first fully modern wholesale market where producers, wholesalers and retailers can operate simultaneously within an integrated logistics environment. The project is expected to:

- reduce food loss,
- improve logistics performance,
- create employment,
- attract public-private investment,
- and strengthen domestic supply chains.

Food loss currently reaches approximately 40% in Nigeria, making logistics modernization a national priority. **Dr Akande** emphasized that food security in Africa will depend less on imports and more on the development of efficient regional value chains and resilient local wholesale infrastructures.

“ We believe in the need for innovation from the ground to ensure food security.”

Dr Adebowale Akande



Milan Urban Food Policy Pact: Wholesale Markets as Living Laboratories

Speaker: Andrea Magarini Pellini
(Director of the Food Policy Department, City of Milan)

Andrea Magarini presented the experience of Milan and the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact (MUFPP), a global network now connecting more than 330 cities worldwide. The network promotes integrated urban food governance based on six core values:

- sustainable diets,
- food security,
- social equity,
- local production,
- responsible distribution,
- and food waste reduction.

Milan's wholesale market, SogeMi, was described as a "living laboratory" where food infrastructure and urban policy interact directly. Several flagship initiatives were presented, including:

- the city's new school meal kitchen centre,
- the Foody Zero Waste Hub,
- and integrated urban agriculture projects.

Milan also manages:

- a protected urban agricultural park of 47,000 hectares,
- 24-hour central kitchens,
- and supply systems connected to 86 suppliers and 400 producers.

“ Our Milano wholesale market SogeMi is a living lab to foster a food policy approach.”

Mr Andrea Magarini

Andrea Magarini emphasized that successful food systems require coordination across multiple territorial scales: local, regional and international.

23

- **Urban relevance**
as strategic as school meals or farmland; ensure food access, fair prices, and local jobs.
- **Policy alignment**
directly contribute to the MUFPP framework and SDGs 11 & 12.
- **Good governance**
public-private models linked to food policy improve efficiency and foster food system innovation.
- **Interconnected agendas**
healthy diets, local chains, green logistics, food waste reduction.
- **Global reach**
cities from Milan, Addis Ababa to Barcelona are rethinking markets as hubs of resilience and transition.



Towards a New Generation of Wholesale Markets

Speaker: Javier Esquillor (Capillar IT, Spain)

Javier Esquillor presented the new WUWM position paper on the "New Wholesale Market Generation," developed over the past two years in collaboration with international partners. The document aims to guide governments, cities, European institutions, and international organisations towards future investments in wholesale infrastructure. According to **Mr Esquillor**, next-generation markets must become:

- hyperconnected,
- digitally integrated,
- sustainable,
- and internationally networked logistics platforms.

Key priorities include:

- digital infrastructure,
- data centres,
- integration into the European electronic Freight Transport Information network (eFTI),
- and stronger railway and multimodal logistics corridors.

The emergence of new European "fresh corridors" connecting countries such as Spain, France and the Netherlands was presented as a major development in the transformation of continental food logistics.

Mr Esquillor also emphasized the importance of:

- secondary urban wholesale hubs,
- shared logistics systems,
- and mutualised retail transportation solutions within large cities.

“ Wholesale markets’ competitive advantage is to have the largest supply.”

Mr Javier Esquillor



Joburg Market: Feeding Southern Africa

Speaker: Sello Makhubela (Johannesburg Market, South Africa)

Sello Makhubela presented Johannesburg Market as the largest wholesale market in Africa, supplying a metropolitan region of approximately seven million inhabitants while also serving more than 20 cities across Southern Africa. Founded 124 years ago, the market is currently undergoing a major modernization strategy aimed at increasing competitiveness against private distribution channels. Current investment priorities include:

- digitalisation,
- online trading,
- real-time transaction systems,

- solar energy production,
- waste valorisation,
- and logistics infrastructure improvements.

The market also guarantees farmers transparent pricing mechanisms and payment within 24 hours. **Mr Makhubela** stressed that African wholesale markets require:

- stronger government support,
- strategic infrastructure investments,
- and increased cooperation between markets across the continent.

“ More collaboration and experience sharing is needed between African markets to be more successful.”

Mr Sello Makhubela



25

→ PANEL DEBATE

Feeding Megacities on a Daily Basis

The panelists then explored the practical meaning of “feeding megacities” from an operational perspective. **Andrea Magarini** explained the complexity of coordinating local urban agriculture, regional sourcing systems and international imports simultaneously. Milan’s school meal system alone supplies 600 schools daily using:

- ▶ 120 electric vans,
- ▶ centralized kitchens,
- ▶ and sophisticated logistics coordination.

Javier Esquillor also highlighted the growing importance of:

- ▶ hyperconnected logistics,
- ▶ retail space management,
- ▶ railway freight systems,
- ▶ and digital coordination tools.

Examples from Amazon and the Port of Rotterdam illustrated how major logistics operators increasingly rely on multimodal and data-driven systems. For Johannesburg Market,

the core mission remains ensuring access to affordable, high-quality food while maintaining strong regional logistics connections throughout Southern Africa.

Logistics Innovation and Future Infrastructure

The debate also explored the logistics innovations required over the next decade. The proposals included:

- ▶ mutualised retail deliveries,
- ▶ AI-supported logistics coordination,
- ▶ real-time stock visibility,
- ▶ and secondary wholesale hubs within large urban areas.

Rail freight corridors were identified as a strategic future priority, particularly within Europe and Africa. **Javier Esquillor** predicted the emergence of major railway freight corridors linking Spain, Italy and Northern Europe within the next ten years, while **Sello Makhubela** envisioned a continental railway corridor extending from Johannesburg to Cairo.

Wholesale Markets : Vital Infrastructures and Drivers of Transition

Speaker: **Valérie Vion** (WUWM General Secretary)

WUWM General Secretary **Valérie Vion** concluded the session by reaffirming that wholesale markets are far more than trading platforms. They are strategic public infrastructures positioned at the intersection of:

- ▶ food transition,
- ▶ economic development,
- ▶ urban sustainability,
- ▶ and social solidarity.

She presented the strategic report co-published by WUWM, the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact and the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation, highlighting the evolving role of wholesale markets as guarantors of food security, economic regulators, social actors and drivers of sustainability.

Valérie Vion outlined the five pillars of the “new generation” wholesale market model:

1. Decarbonised logistics infrastructures,
2. Sovereign digital platforms,
3. Fair retail economies,
4. Shared governance,
5. Mixed public-private financing.

Examples from Bologna, Guadalajara, Barcelona and Milan demonstrated that such transformation is already underway in several regions of the world.

“ Wholesale markets are not just business hubs, they are also strategic public spaces.”

Mrs Valérie Vion





Session 3. Food Donation: A Key Strategy for Sustainable Food Systems

27

The third session of the Brussels conference focused on the growing importance of food donation programmes and solidarity initiatives within wholesale markets. Against a backdrop of increasing food insecurity, rising living costs and persistent food waste, delegates discussed how wholesale markets can become central actors in more sustainable and socially inclusive food systems. Speakers from public institutions, the European Commission and food donation organisations emphasized that unsold food should increasingly be considered a “resource” rather than waste, provided it is redistributed before deterioration occurs. Wholesale markets were repeatedly identified as ideal logistical hubs for food recovery, redistribution and labour reintegration initiatives.

Case Study of Brussels: The DREAM Project

Speaker: David Weytsman (President of the Public Welfare Centre of Brussels City)

David Weytsman presented the Brussels DREAM project (Direct Redistribution of Food Surpluses in Mabru), an initiative launched in 2015 within Mabru Wholesale Market to combat both food waste and food insecurity. He first recalled the central mission of the Brussels

Public Welfare Centre (CPAS), which guarantees social assistance and the right to live in dignity for vulnerable populations. The organisation manages hospitals, child-care centres, public housing, employment programmes and numerous social economy projects across Brussels.

“ Let’s continue to believe that solidarity, innovation and cooperation can make a real difference in the lives of thousands of people.”

Mr David Weytsman



Despite its role as the European capital, Brussels continues to face severe social inequalities:

- ▶ 28% of the population lives below the poverty risk threshold,
- ▶ around 10,000 people are homeless,
- ▶ and approximately 10% of residents experience severe material deprivation.

According to **Mr Weytsman**, the number of people depending on food aid has steadily increased over the past decade, with approximately 55,000 people currently relying on food donations in Brussels. Within this context, DREAM has become a major solidarity mechanism operating directly inside Mabru Wholesale Market. Together with partner food banks and charitable organisations, the project redistributes approximately 600 tons of unsold fruit and vegetables every week to nearly 15,000 beneficiaries.

Beyond food redistribution, DREAM also promotes labour reintegration, vocational training, social inclusion, public health, and environmental sustainability. The initiative currently collaborates with approx. 120 partner organisations throughout Brussels. **David Weytsman** stressed that food support is no longer an emergency measure but an essential component of urban social policy.

28

Food Donation in Wholesale Markets: An EU Perspective

Speaker: Rikke Karlsson (DG for Health and Food Safety, European Commission)

Rikke Karlsson presented the European Union’s strategy on food waste reduction and food donation within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 12.3, which aims to halve food waste by 2030. She noted that despite growing awareness and multiple public initiatives, food waste levels continue to increase across Europe.

According to Eurostat data:

- ▶ more than 58 million tons of food were wasted in the European Union in 2023,
- ▶ representing approximately 130 kilograms per inhabitant.

Food waste distribution currently breaks down as follows:

- ▶ 53% generated at household level,
- ▶ 47% occurring across production, processing, distribution, food service and retail sectors.



“ We shall rather talk about surplus handling rather than food waste donations.”

Mrs Rikke Karlsson

At the same time, approx. 42 million Europeans cannot afford balanced meals containing sufficient protein every second day, while food donation associations are struggling to satisfy increasing demand. The European Union's Waste Framework Directive now establishes national reduction targets:

- ▶ 10% reduction in food waste within processing and manufacturing,
- ▶ 30% reduction across the rest of the supply chain, including wholesale distribution and households.

Wholesale markets were encouraged to conduct food waste diagnostics, identify hotspots, improve storage and logistics systems, implement real-time inventory management, and develop partnerships with schools, charities and secondary markets.

Rikke Karlsson also advocated changing the terminology surrounding food donation initiatives. She further recommended that each country and organisation appoint dedicated food donation coordinators capable of facilitating cooperation between public authorities, private operators and charitable organisations.

Food Donation at Rungis Market: The ANDES Association

Speaker: Nicolas Lemonnier (Potager de Marianne, ANDES-SOS Group)

Presenting the activities of the National Association for the Development of Solidarity-based Grocery Stores (ANDES-SOS Group) and its "Potager de Marianne" initiative operating at Rungis International Market, **Mr Lemonnier** recalled that approximatively 14.4% of the French population lives in poverty and that food inflation of nearly 25% over the past three years has significantly increased pressure on household budgets.

At the same time, substantial quantities of edible produce continue to be wasted at farm and wholesale levels. ANDES currently coordinates:

- ▶ 650 social grocery stores,
- ▶ 6 distribution centres located inside wholesale markets,
- ▶ and labour reintegration programmes employing vulnerable workers.

Products distributed through the network are sold at only 10-30% of their normal market value. In 2024 alone:

- ▶ 6,200 tons of food were redistributed,
- ▶ including 4,600 tons of fresh fruit and vegetables,
- ▶ benefiting 520 partner organisations and 245 social grocery stores.

The organisation also achieved strong social outcomes, with approximately 60% of workers in labour reintegration programmes successfully returning to employment. **Nicolas Lemonnier** highlighted that food donation systems create benefits not only for vulnerable populations but also for wholesalers themselves by reducing disposal costs, generating tax incentives, supporting CSR objectives, and facilitating labour recruitment. Approximately 74% of the food volumes handled by the association originate directly from the Rungis ecosystem.



“ The strategic location of a food bank on a wholesale market helps vendors find a solution in case of surplus.”

Mr Nicolas Lemonnier



→ PANEL DEBATE

Food Donation as a Sustainable Strategy

The session concluded with a debate, focusing on the operational and structural challenges of implementing large-scale food donation programmes. Several recurring challenges were identified:

- securing freshness and rapid logistics,
- coordinating deliveries,
- increasing private-sector participation,
- and ensuring sufficient financial resources for food bank operations.

David Weytsman emphasized the growing cooperation between public institutions and private retailers such as Delhaize and Colruyt

supermarkets, while **Nicolas Lemonnier** stressed the importance of building trust with producers and wholesalers: *"Farmers increase their contribution when they understand what we do with their surplus."* **Rikke Karlsson** noted that legislation alone is insufficient unless clear operational coordination mechanisms exist at national and organisational levels.

A strong consensus also emerged around the need to replace the notion of "waste" with the concept of "resources," reflecting the idea that edible surplus food should be redirected before becoming waste.

Final Recommendations

In the concluding exchanges, panelists shared several practical recommendations to strengthen food donation systems within wholesale markets:

- integrate food banks directly inside wholesale infrastructures,
- facilitate access for charity organisations,
- strengthen public-private cooperation,
- encourage fiscal incentives for donations,
- and improve awareness among wholesalers and producers.

Mr Lemonnier highlighted that food donations often become economically rational solutions during periods of market saturation: *"When given to charities before it becomes waste, you can save*

money and be more sustainable." **David Weytsman** encouraged both public administrations and private operators to act more proactively in supporting solidarity initiatives: *"Don't think too much and just do it, because many people need it."* The session concluded with a strong call for action from the European Commission.

Food waste is a major problem, we know the solution, you have the solution, so please act."

Mrs Rikke Karlsson

Awards Ceremony



2025 WUWM Manager of the Year Award: Eder Eduardo Bublitz, CEO of Ceasa Paraná, Brazil

32

The World Union of Wholesale Markets awarded the 2025 WUWM Manager of the Year distinction to **Mr Eder Eduardo Bublitz**, Chief Executive Officer of Ceasa Paraná in Brazil, in recognition of his outstanding leadership and transformative contribution to the development of the wholesale market sector. Under his leadership, Ceasa Paraná implemented major infrastructure modernisation projects while accelerating the adoption of sustainability initiatives, including:

- ▶ large-scale LED energy transitions,
- ▶ solar energy systems,
- ▶ and innovative environmental management programmes.

A particular emphasis was placed on the social dimension of the market's activities through the creation of the "Good Food Bank" initiative. The programme successfully prevented nearly 7,500 tons of food waste while supporting more than 1.5 million people through food redistribution efforts.

Ceasa Curitiba also became the first wholesale market in Brazil to obtain ISO 14001 environmental certification, demonstrating its strong commitment to sustainable management practices.

Significant progress was additionally achieved in:

- ▶ workplace safety,
- ▶ organisational governance,
- ▶ and gender equity, with women now representing approx. 30% of the workforce.

WUWM praised **Mr Bublitz's** strategic vision and his capacity to combine operational performance, sustainability and social impact, setting a strong example for wholesale markets worldwide.



Special Jury Recognition: Sello Makhubela, CEO of Joburg Market, South Africa

A Special Jury Recognition Award was presented to **Mr Sello Makhubela**, Chief Executive Officer of Joburg Market, South Africa, in honour of his transformative leadership and exceptional achievements in governance and operational excellence.

Under his direction, Joburg Market achieved:

- two consecutive Clean Audits,
- recognition as a Top Employer 2024/2025,
- the SALGA Clean Audit Award,
- and the CIPS Best Teamwork Award.

Mr Makhubela's leadership was particularly recognised for:

- strengthening transparency,
- improving staff development,
- enhancing stakeholder relations,
- and increasing operational performance.

Customer satisfaction at Joburg Market reached approximately 67%, reflecting the market's continued efforts to improve service quality and reinforce its position as one of Africa's leading wholesale markets. The award also acknowledged Joburg Market's growing role in supporting food security and modern wholesale logistics throughout Southern Africa.

33



Closing Session

The **Brussels 2025 Conference** concluded with closing remarks by WUWM Chairman **Stéphane Layani**, who thanked all delegates, speakers, partners and organisers for their active participation and commitment throughout the event. Special appreciation was addressed to the Mabru team, notably **Sevket Temiz**, **Laurent Nys** and **Anicée Henin**, as well as to the WUWM Secretariat, including **Valérie Vion** and **Hermine de Nantois**, for the successful organisation of the Congress. The conference closed with a renewed commitment to strengthening wholesale markets as key infrastructures for food sovereignty, sustainability, innovation and social solidarity.

“ A big thank you to all WUWM members and conference delegates for your energy and your commitment to strengthen wholesale markets and food systems.”

Mr Stéphane Layani

Conclusion



The 42nd WUWM Congress in Brussels reaffirmed the essential role wholesale markets play in building resilient, efficient and inclusive food systems. Bringing together delegates from more than 30 countries, the conference highlighted how wholesale markets are evolving far beyond their traditional trading function to become strategic infrastructures at the crossroads of food security, sustainability, innovation and social cohesion.

Throughout the discussions, participants addressed the major transformations affecting global agrifood systems, including geopolitical instability, climate change, urbanisation, digital transition and growing food insecurity. Wholesale markets were consistently presented as key actors capable of ensuring reliable food supply chains while connecting producers, distributors and consumers within increasingly complex urban environments.

Digital transformation emerged as one of the conference's central priorities. Artificial intelligence and data-driven technologies are already improving forecasting, logistics management, traceability, warehouse operations and customer services. At the same time, delegates stressed that innovation must remain

human-centred, transparent and ethically regulated, particularly regarding data protection and the responsible use of AI. The development of interconnected "smart wholesale markets" was identified as a decisive next step for the sector.

The challenge of feeding megacities also featured prominently throughout the conference. Examples from Milan, Johannesburg, Brussels and Nigeria demonstrated the growing importance of modern wholesale infrastructures in strengthening food sovereignty, supporting local and regional sourcing, and improving urban logistics resilience. Participants underlined the need for stronger cooperation between markets, governments and logistics operators, as well as continued investment in multimodal transport, railway freight and digital supply-chain integration.

Sustainability and social responsibility were equally central to the debates. Wholesale markets increasingly position themselves as drivers of environmental transition through investments in solar energy, energy-efficient refrigeration systems and circular economy initiatives. Food donation programmes such as DREAM in Brussels and the ANDES-SOS network at Rungis illustrated how markets can simultaneously reduce food waste and support vulnerable populations. A broad consensus emerged around

the idea that unsold food should be considered a resource rather than waste. **The Brussels Congress** concluded with a renewed collective commitment from WUWM members and partners to strengthen wholesale markets as pillars of food sovereignty, economic resilience and sustainable urban development. The exchanges throughout the conference confirmed that wholesale markets possess a unique capacity to combine leadership, performance and innovation in response to the evolving challenges facing global food systems.



Speakers, Sponsors & Partners

Welcoming words by the WUWM Chairman

Stéphane Layani



38

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39

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