

Grodan is celebrating its 40<sup>th</sup> year. To mark this occasion the company wanted to contribute to the horticultural sector by organising the symposium:

## Modern solutions for modern challenges

*About the future of high-tech horticulture*

### Expert session for influencers and stakeholders, 22 September 2009

The point of departure of the expert session was the balance between the requirements of society (in particular with regard to the environment) and the profitability of high-tech horticulture, both today and in the future. The expectations and implications of high-tech horticulture in the future were discussed.

### Short summary of the results

#### Businesses facing a dilemma

The general consensus in the group is that sustainability and profitability should be able to go hand in hand. The sector needs to win the credit it deserves for its efforts (the consumer must see the results). Sustainability is the road to follow, but businesses are facing a dilemma: during the next few years it will be hard enough just keeping their heads above water. The challenge is to maintain the level of expertise. The group is convinced that there is enough enthusiasm: *“If a meeting is organised about geothermal heating, for example, there is always a huge turnout.”* This sector is taking the offensive!

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Entrepreneurship</li> <li>▪ Knowledge and high-tech status of the sector</li> <li>▪ Cooperation (but is on the decrease)</li> <li>▪ Horticultural tradition (the Netherlands is <i>the</i> cradle of knowledge and high-tech)</li> <li>▪ Clean production</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Fragmentation of supply and ‘brands’</li> <li>▪ Little market innovation</li> <li>▪ Too little innovation in cultivation technology</li> <li>▪ Sector needs to learn more from other sectors</li> </ul>
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Controlled production environments</li> <li>▪ Better utilisation of the logistical advantages of the Schiphol/Rotterdam region</li> <li>▪ Knowledge exchange (national and international)</li> <li>▪ New ways of cooperating (e.g. FresQ)</li> <li>▪ Publicity for the modernity of the chain</li> <li>▪ We can and must be transparent</li> <li>▪ Recognise the importance of the ‘people factor’</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Competition from the organic market</li> <li>▪ Image &amp; consumer scepticism</li> <li>▪ Local for local (is also an opportunity)</li> <li>▪ Carbon foot print (we are losing out on this because there is no integrated approach)</li> <li>▪ Crisis: little investment; maintain present knowledge level</li> <li>▪ Discord between high-tech and the consumer seems to be getting worse</li> </ul>

**Themes for the future**

The themes for the future were discussed on the basis of the above SWOT analysis. Due to the present circumstances, the short term goals will involve limited investments that show immediate returns. Technological innovation will continue, but there is some scepticism about the field of cultivation technology. *“There is insufficient knowledge and it is insufficiently integrated. This is an area for attention for the future. We need to ensure that we achieve the maximum potential return.”* Controlled production environments, where processes in relation to energy, fossil fuels and water are managed, are seen as the theme for the future. Water will become an important theme on the international agenda, but this factor is difficult to operationalise. It is as yet unclear what the Dutch horticulture sector wishes to do with this theme. Water is an opportunity for the Netherlands, while CO<sub>2</sub> is seen as a threat.

**Possible approach**

Innovation needs to be based on a long term vision: *“All present innovations are aimed at short term returns.”* There is also a call for more market innovations, less fragmentation and more cooperation to improve the development and implementation of innovation. Moreover, the sector has a lot to learn from other sectors. The sector must take the offensive; the Netherlands is *the* cradle of knowledge and high-tech in the food production industry and must (and should) remain so.

**Preconditions**

Communicating the success stories is crucial: *“The discord between high-tech and the consumer will always be there, but at the present it only seems to be getting worse.”* The sector needs to communicate differently. Emotion and quantitative evidence are required. The sector can and must be transparent. The sector will also need to strengthen its links with the public and communicate better. And finally: *“We need to learn to see the environment as an opportunity and efficiency as a strength.”*