

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 technical suppliers, 14 September 2009

The point of departure of the expert session was the balance between the requirements of the public (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

#### There is already a lot happening right now

With regard to the environment theme, the group's general reaction was that there is already a lot happening right now, but that the sector is not communicating this properly to the outside world. *"The Netherlands is actually a leader in this field."* The sector needs to join forces in order to tell the story effectively. *"Sales and PR are the sector's biggest problems. This will not change for the next five years."*

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Innovation and the drive for progress: great leaps are being made</li> <li>▪ High level of technology / knowledge</li> <li>▪ A long history of leadership at the global level</li> <li>▪ High productivity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Innovation is often reactive (under legislative pressure); insufficiently consumer-oriented thinking</li> <li>▪ Time between development and roll-out of innovations is long</li> <li>▪ Production and cost-price oriented</li> <li>▪ High costs of energy, labour and land</li> <li>▪ Sales market fragmentation</li> <li>▪ Industry culture: too inwards oriented and too little focused beyond individual interests</li> <li>▪ Real sustainable thinking is still rare</li> </ul>
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Themes for the future: sustainability (the Netherlands can and must play a leading role), taste and fresh products</li> <li>▪ Food safety: develop our proposition</li> <li>▪ More cooperation in the chain and between suppliers</li> <li>▪ More and more issues require integrated thinking</li> <li>▪ Export of existing knowledge – lots of potential for development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Sales and PR the biggest problems</li> <li>▪ Legislation and finance are important preconditions over which we have little control</li> </ul>

**Themes for the future**

The themes for the future were discussed on the basis of the above SWOT analysis. Three important themes stood out: sustainability, taste and fresh products. CO<sub>2</sub>, energy and water are the defining factors for sustainability, whereby water is seen as the factor with the most potential for progress in the long term. *“The Netherlands can play a leading role in horticultural water management.”*

In the short term, the group has high expectations with regard to greenhouses and the development of the ‘closed greenhouse’ concept, as well as mobile systems. More in general, the rise of the ‘local for local’ and ‘cradle to cradle’ concepts are important developments. The carbon footprint as label is expected to give form to the increasing demand for more transparency.

**Possible approach**

More and more issues require integrated thinking. Technical suppliers will need to cooperate more (together and with growers) to deal with these issues (e.g. crop protection and water purification). The sector needs to find new ways of cooperating, and maybe even new leadership. Generally speaking, the speed of innovation needs to be decreased, and creativity and cooperation need to be increased.

**Preconditions**

There is plenty of enthusiasm for, and understanding of, the need to look further than individual interests and practice more integrated thinking: *“But it’s not part of our culture. “Real sustainable thinking (for a greater good) is still a rare commodity.”* According to the group, driving factors such as legislation and finance are extremely important for the degree and type of innovation in the future. They agree that the sector needs to be more proactive. *“On November 19, the talk should not be about money, but about sustainability. We need to put the spotlight on successful projects and offer solutions to the political arena.”*