

Grodan is celebrating its 40th 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 trade organizations, 17 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

Chain approach is important

“Real sustainability can only be achieved if the whole chain participates.” This was the general reaction of the participants to the issue of sustainability. *“Growers are losing the advantage of added value in the chain because there are too many people ‘shifting boxes’. This can only be achieved if the chain undergoes a major reorganisation.”* The explanation for the above statements is thought to lie in the fact that the chain is not consumer oriented and that there is insufficient cooperation on the basis of a tangible shared vision. Communication is also seen as a problem: *“We could certainly increase the returns if we improved the communication with regard to sustainable initiatives.”*

| Strengths | Weaknesses |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Knowledge infrastructure: intensive and fast ▪ Reliable and reproducible product ▪ Innovative culture among growers ▪ Clean production ▪ The Netherlands as the centre of world trade | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fragmentation of the sector ▪ Cost-price oriented thinking ▪ Lack of direction in production ▪ Communication fails to place high-tech in a positive light |
| Opportunities | Threats |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ High-tech = sustainable; the Netherlands is successful at combining technology and nature ▪ We are capable of producing the best products (but often we do not) ▪ Ample finance available for high-tech innovations (political arena supports us) ▪ There are plenty of success stories that do not get the right publicity. Make high-tech trendy – Feed the World ▪ Collectively deal with aspects such as supply and promotional campaigns | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ High urgency and much scepticism; the sector needs to be fundamentally changed (no easy solutions) ▪ Sector is trying to solve too many things internally – more outward orientation and the use of external professionals |

Themes for the future

The themes for the future were discussed on the basis of the above SWOT analysis. Parties agreed that sustainability, and in particular water, will remain *the* theme in the future. There is an increasing demand for quantification (carbon footprint) and transparency. Consumers continue to be concerned about pesticides - the reduction of residues.

Possible approach

Generally speaking, a lot more of these issues should be dealt with collectively. *“The whole chain is too fragmented - from sales to advertising.”* The consensus is that there is a great deal of urgency: *“Fundamental changes need to be made in the chain.”*

Preconditions

Effective communication is the most important precondition. There are plenty of success stories that are not getting the right publicity. Opinions differ on what the message should be: emphasis on the product itself (health/taste), promotional campaigns ‘a la Bertolli’, or make high-tech relevant for consumers. *“High-tech must be offered as a solution, whereby it should be set in a wider – worldwide - context (Feed the World). This is an important opportunity for the Netherlands.”* A fixed set of specifications, such as used by the Flandria auction (for using a NL logo) is seen as one way to improve the message relating to the product and the sector in general.