

A more sustainable fruit and vegetable sector: Belgian cooperatives rise to the challenge

VBT rolls out renewed sustainability strategy

Sustainable development is a dynamic and very topical subject: it affects us today, tomorrow and also into the future. The cooperative fruit and vegetable sector, wants to further improve its sustainability.

VBT President, Rita Demaré rolled out the VBT's renewed sustainability strategy on 7 February 2019 at the Fruit Logistica trade show in Berlin. The collective quality label Responsibly Fresh remains a way for people to identify fruit and vegetables which have been produced with a concern for sustainability. The new slogan 'Goodness by nature' emphasises the fact that the products, which are healthy by nature, are grown with the minimum impact on the environment.

Responsibly Fresh, Goodness by nature

The collective sustainability project launched the Responsibly Fresh label when it started in 2012, referring to fresh fruit and vegetables grown in a socially responsible manner. Via Responsibly Fresh, the fruit and vegetable producers and their cooperatives which are members of the VBT have collectively been working hard over recent years towards sustainable development. They first looked at getting their own businesses in order. They have made meaningful progress, by obtaining the necessary certificates and inspection by external parties. They intend to press on with their efforts towards sustainable development, but the producers and their cooperatives will also be engaging more in outreach operations, starting from their own efforts towards sustainable development and offering help and support to all stakeholders in the food chain.

The VBT, the producers' cooperatives and the producers themselves will be continuing to look towards, and work on, the global movement which wants to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

VBT President Rita Demaré says: *"As from 2019, our producers and VBT cooperatives are pressing on with our efforts towards sustainability under the slogan of 'Goodness by nature', in order to emphasise that our products, which are healthy by nature, are grown with the minimum impact on people and the environment. In the renewed strategy, we are pledging to embed our efforts towards sustainability in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. We have highlighted eight of them where we as a sector can make the greatest difference."*

Three new highlights of a renewed approach

The sustainable commitment in the renewed strategy contributes towards a wide range of fruit and vegetables which are reliable, top-quality and healthy for consumers both today and in the future. The producers consciously opt for a cooperative approach and are keen to make progress while showing respect for people and the planet.

1. Cooperative businesses are sustainable businesses

The word cooperative means working together. This is what the fruit and vegetable producers do. Instead of selling their products on the local and international markets individually, the mainly family-owned businesses have grouped themselves together and formed cooperatives. This enables them to support one another through good and bad times.

2. Sustainably produced, healthily consumed

We can live a healthier lifestyle by moving more and through mindful consumption. Fruit and vegetables are naturally healthy and delicious. They offer a wide and diverse choice, leading to a varied diet and a rich taste palette. The cooperatives and their producers regard encouraging the consumption of their healthy, sustainable products as a priority and at the same time, they are committed to promoting food thrift.

3. Progress with respect for the elements of nature

The producers and their producers' cooperatives are committed to achieving progress in economic terms, but always with respect for the people and the planet.

Thanks to their sustainability efforts, the fruit and vegetable producers and their VBT cooperatives make an important contribution to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations. What this means in concrete terms is that they are pledging to work on the following Sustainable Development Goals:



Offer tasty, healthy food, with attention for **food safety, food thrift and responsible packaging.**

Fruit and vegetable producers and their cooperatives are aware of the importance of the **health, safety and welfare of their employees.**



The horticultural cooperatives annually allocate a substantial budget to **scientific and applied research**, actively looking for **innovation and improvement.**

From a cooperative mind set, and looking broadly at sustainable development, the producers and their cooperatives also engage with **projects in the South.**



Being mindful of water consumption is essential. The horticultural sector uses as much collected and stored rainwater as possible. For sorting processes, drinking water is used for safety reasons, but as thriftily as possible.

The majority of the producers are already taking energy-saving measures to reduce the **energy consumption.** Almost half of them produce energy on site, mainly through photovoltaic cells, CHP and even residual heat.



The crops capture CO₂, and diverse forms of emissions are limited as much as possible. The VBT horticultural cooperatives have developed different initiatives to limit the impact of transport inherent to their activities.

Producers are taking measures to retain soil structure and nutrient content and to curb soil erosion. The VBT cooperatives have supported their producers in the correct application of integrated crop management and protection. Biodiversity is important and natural pollination is essential for good fertilisation and production.



A logo with a story

Responsibly Fresh is and remains the recognisable label, supplemented by a slogan which perfectly encapsulates the sustainable production of fruit and vegetables.



Goodness by nature

The Responsibly Fresh logo reflects the various aspects involved in the sustainability strategy. The logo has the shape of the earth as the basis for the production of fruit and vegetables. The mix of colours, suggesting a rainbow, reflects what sustainability is all about: uniting or balancing the seemingly incompatible elements of people, planet, profit, peace and partnership. The letter G is also visible in the logo. This stands for global, green and good citizenship. The leaf in the middle of the G symbolises greenery and growth, bringing it all back to fruit and vegetables.

The G now also refers to 'Goodness by nature'. The slogan emphasises that fruit and vegetables, which are healthy by nature, are grown with a minimum impact on the environment.

'Goodness' refers to the good nutritional value of fruit and vegetables, because they do contain lots of nutrients and fibre. In addition, 'by nature' refers to the natural origin of the products.

Responsibly Fresh, 'Goodness by nature' is a label for all fruit and vegetables produced by the participating producers' cooperatives. It will be consistently used in combination or integrated into their existing product brands.

The Association of Belgian Horticultural Cooperatives (VBT) is the owner of the Responsibly Fresh label, and the participating cooperatives are BelOrta, Belgische Fruitveiling, Coöperatie Hoogstraten, Limburgse Tuinbouwveiling and REO Veiling.

For more information, visit the new website: www.responsiblyfresh.eu

Participating producers' cooperatives:



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