



PRESS REPORT
VBT presents the second sustainability report
Responsibly Fresh



Koolskamp, 15 June 2016

The Belgian fruit and vegetable marketing cooperatives, better known as ‘the auctions’, and their producers are delivering on their commitments to sustainable development. In 2012, the VBT teamed up with the auctions and their producers to form the collective sustainability project and label Responsibly Fresh. At that time, the various participants each made a specific commitment.

The second sustainability report, which covers the period 2014-2015, shows that the participants have succeeded in their task and are constantly working to develop sustainably. For this purpose the collective character of the project remains important. The sustainability report has been handed over today by the VBT to Flemish Minister-President Geert Bourgeois in the presence of the participating auctions.

In his reaction, the Minister-President underscored the fact that the collective approach of Responsibly Fresh is unique and can deliver added value abroad as well. The project produces an important impact because it is about the whole sector developing sustainably together. The key points in the report were explained to the press and stakeholders at the farm of chicory grower Marnick De Visschere in Koolskamp. He shared his own experiences regarding Responsibly Fresh.

Responsibly Fresh: collective sustainability project

The second sustainability report from Responsibly Fresh explores the sustainability challenges facing the cooperatively organised fresh fruit and vegetable sector. It describes the strategy deployed by Responsibly Fresh in tackling those challenges collectively as a sector. When Responsibly Fresh first started as a sustainability project, the various participants each made a specific commitment, on which they have delivered over the years.

VBT supported the incorporation of sustainability criteria in existing quality systems. The marketing cooperatives have earned the certificate of a sustainable or socially responsible business charter (CSR) for several cycles in succession. The producers continue to qualify for the basic condition for participation in Responsibly Fresh, a certificate for GLOBALG.A.P. or Vegaplan.

In addition, the marketing cooperatives have been tracking the progress of their producers with regard to various sustainability criteria by once again drawing up a collective dossier, taking as the benchmark the start of Responsibly Fresh and the first collective dossier in 2014. The collective dossier includes 49 sustainability criteria and was drafted with the input of 2,652 producers, including all producers with a product turnover of more than € 25,000. Laurien Danckaerts, who is in charge of the sustainability report at the VBT, says: *‘There are clear signs of progress on virtually all the sustainability criteria in the collective dossier, thanks in part to the support of the growers via their cooperative.’* The measures taken and planned in the collective dossier relate to various sustainability topics, and range from energy- and water-saving growing techniques to integrated cultivation, specific provisions for workers, professional training and the producers’ own participation in the sociocultural life in the local area. The status in the collective dossier and the action points devised within the charters, supplemented with relevant business information from the participants, forms the content of the sustainability report. The report has been drawn up in accordance with the guidelines in the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), an internationally recognised standard for transparent sustainability reporting.

Responsibly Fresh: involvement in external initiatives

When Responsibly Fresh first started, five participating marketing cooperatives were involved: Belgische Fruitveiling, BelOrta, Coöperatie Hoogstraten, Limburgse Tuinbouwveiling and REO Veiling. The addition of Veiling Haspengouw to the project in 2014 further extended the reach of the project. The content of the project was also expanded with the start of a section devoted to Activities in the South. The participants in Responsibly Fresh are seeking to support farmers' organisations in the South, working from the firm belief that cooperative organisations can represent added value for them. Sustainability and a cooperative approach are clearly linked, something which the participants in Responsibly Fresh have already known for years.

These are various initiatives which the cooperatively organised fresh fruit and vegetable sector is embarking upon in its efforts to honour its responsibility for making the agri-food chain more sustainable. These efforts are communicated via the Responsibly Fresh label to the subsequent links in the chain. This makes Responsibly Fresh a recognisable symbol for buyers and stakeholders interested in sustainable development in the sector. The coming years will also see the participants continuing to rise to the challenge of making sure that their sector continues to develop sustainably. Rita Demaré, VBT President, explains that the aim is to achieve collaboration with stakeholders and involvement in external sustainability initiatives, such as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): *'In the months ahead, we will look at which SDGs are relevant to our sector. The SDGs form an international strategy for bringing about sustainable development. So we believe that it is also important for us to pledge ourselves to pursue these goals via Responsibly Fresh.'*

Further progress along the path towards sustainable development is being achieved by:



Contact person: Philippe Appeltans – VBT General Secretary – GSM 0475 95 63 16
More information: VBT – www.vbt.eu and Responsibly Fresh – www.responsibly-fresh.eu