



STRONGER TOGETHER

ANNUAL REPORT
2024

TABLE OF CONTENTS

4-11 This is where VBT made the difference in 2024

14-16 Belorta and Marc are part of VBT

17 The DNA of the cooperatives

18-20 Hoogstraten and Nathalie are part of VBT

21 Flemish Minister of Agriculture Jo Brouns: “This is the power of cooperatives”

22-24 REO and Dirk are part of VBT

25 This is how VBT works

26-28 Ingro and Hilde and Danny are part of VBT

29 Lennart Nilsson, chairman of Cogeca, on cooperatives as the key to a sustainable future

30-31 At these tables VBT defends the interests of fruit and vegetable growers

32-35 2024 in numbers

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2024, a turbulent year
How did VBT make a difference?

2024 was an incredibly busy year for the cooperative fruit and vegetable sector. And therefore also for VBT. We faced a variety of challenges in terms of production, trade and politics. In particular, the geopolitical conflicts in the Middle East and Ukraine caused unrest in the markets. The future of our sector will be determined by the accelerating energy transition and the availability of sufficient crop protection products and manpower. VBT wants to be a pillar of support for the sector, facing these challenges.

“Rain again?!”, yes, the gloomy weather of the wettest year ever had a substantial impact on the cooperative fruit and vegetable sector: in 2024 the volume of produced and sold products decreased. **Supplies of vegetables decreased by 4% and for fruit by almost 3%. Nevertheless, turnover increased by 6% for vegetables and by 16% for fruit.** In total, we achieved a record turnover of 1.26 billion euros in the fresh market and 155 million euros in the frozen food market (INGRO). That record turnover does not mean record profits. Rising sales are counterbalanced by rising production costs of farms and increasingly stringent production requirements.

In addition, 2024 was also an important election year. Worldwide, about 4 billion people cast their vote.

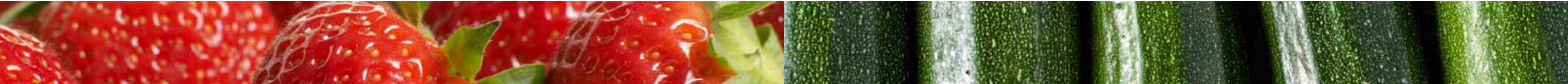
In Belgium, new elections took place at every level of government, and the EU also elected a new parliament. **All these elections meant high political tension and many new policy plans.**

In short, 2024 was a year full of challenges. **Of course, VBT got involved in the debates.**



Rita Demaré
President

Luc Vanoirbeek
General Secretary



Sustainability: making the voice of Europe's farmers heard

The challenge?

2024 was largely about the European Commission's ambitious sustainability agenda. VBT has left its mark in various cases for the benefit of the cooperative fruit and vegetable sector.

How did VBT make a difference?

A first European case on the agenda was sustainable packaging (less plastic) and combating packaging waste. **VBT acted in various forums to ensure that the objective of this measure was addressed with common sense.** Together with Freshfel Europe and Copa-Cogeca, we wanted to avoid that a ban on plastic packaging would lead to more food waste. **In concrete terms, our efforts resulted in a single EU approach that prevented the threat of undermining the single market.** We will now work on a European list of products that cannot be placed on the market without plastic packaging. This is a tough challenge for 2025 in a diverse landscape of fruit and vegetables in the EU.

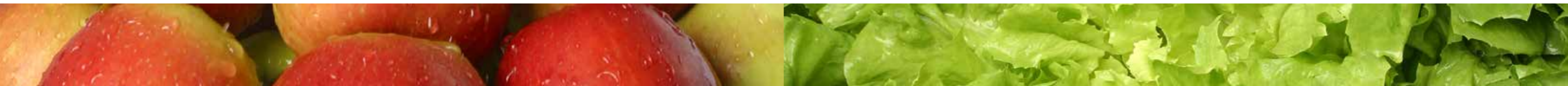
In other dossiers on the European level, VBT actively contributed to an objective methodology to calculate the Product Environmental Footprint (PEF). This is an initiative of Freshfel Europe. The goal? Fair and objectively verifiable comparisons of the environmental impact of different products in different regions. VBT and its members also actively participated in the Freshfel Europe project on the European CSRD (Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive).

In Flanders, VBT contributed to the improvement of water quality in the context of the preparation of the manure action plan MAP 7. We did this together with the farmers' unions and colleagues from B3W (Begeleidingsdienst voor Betere Bodem- en Waterkwaliteit), Belgapom and Vegebe. Initially, we focused on training the producers' advisors because they have a strong connection with practice. They are also confidants for farmers. We are convinced that with more insight into fertilization practices, we can achieve better water quality. The Care4Growing app, developed by our members, already provides insight into the concentrations of fertilizers in the water. The app will continue to claim an important

role in the future. This case will receive further attention in 2025, as will the Charter that we are drawing up together with other buyers and processors of fruit and vegetables.

VBT coordinated the sectoral monitoring plan for plant protection products' residues, microbiology, contaminants and heavy metals. The members carry out the monitoring as jointly determined, based on an analysis of the data from previous years.

VBT regularly raised the issue of tackling the proliferation of administrative burdens in various forums. This paid off: in the end, the subject was also put on the agenda of the European social dialogue for horticulture. Administration is a means, not an end. We see in the fruit and vegetable sector a proliferation of quality systems that continue to formulate new requirements under the guise of "it is better to control than to trust" without any added value in return. This has to stop. **We were in regular contact with Copa-Cogeca's European colleagues about this, with whom we carried out a study to map out all the requirements of the management systems. We took this overview to the European umbrella organisation of retail, Eurocommerce, who promised to debate our demands.** This action by VBT met some of the demands of the farmers who protested in the spring of 2024.



Crop protection: enforcing international fair play

The challenge?

On the one hand, we saw more and more diseases and pests emerge in 2024 due to climate change. On the other hand, there is an increasing demand to reduce the availability and the use of plant protection products. This is a potentially dangerous cocktail. Without a suitable toolbox, fruit and vegetable production is not possible. This theme is without a doubt one of the biggest challenges facing our sector.

How did VBT make a difference?

VBT pleaded for a well-considered approach to this issue at various international forums, together with Copa-Cogeca, Profel (the European umbrella organisation of fruit and vegetable processors) and Freshfel Europe. We will continue this plea in 2025.

First of all, we argue for more realism. The priority for our research institutions is the development of alternative crop protection products to prevent diseases and pests with the least possible environmental impact. To do this, the lead time of the recognition of alternative bio-based plant protection products should be shortened. Europe is lagging behind other continents in this

area, which means that large crop protection product manufacturers are no longer investing in the EU.

We also advocate fair play in international trade. We cannot accept that the EU should set high standards for our producers while importing products that do not meet these standards.

By supporting research and development in fruit and vegetable production, VBT contributed to innovations that enable the Flemish fruit and vegetable sector to distinguish itself from foreign colleagues.

Even today, we continue to believe in the power of innovation and the importance of research institutions. Together with the research centres, we are investigating which applications should be included in trials with a view to approval. In any case, one thing is certain: a lot of changes are imminent in our sector.



In the same context, VBT contributed to the debate on the sustainable use of plant protection products in the European Parliament. This one stranded halfway 2024, but it is not over and VBT will certainly put it on the agenda again – also in Flanders. VBT also drew up advice cards for each crop with an overview of all authorized plant protection products. VBT closely monitors this legislation and when a change occurs, we inform the stakeholders by means of newsletters.

In order to make information on the legislation and research on plant protection products accessible, VBT continues to make the Care4Growing platform available to growers. We add the applications that are authorized and any changes to the Care4Growing platform. In the app we also bundle the latest state of affairs of European, Belgian and Flemish legislation. This way, growers can always check their planned/desired treatments with the legislation in force. When necessary, we enter into dialogue with the competent authorities in order to defend the interests of our members and their growers.

As a third-party organisation, VBT can apply for extensions of authorisations of plant protection products for use in small crops, which include almost all fruit and vegetables.

In order to expose the bottlenecks and find solutions, VBT is in constant consultation with our members, governments, research centres and phytofirms in these dossiers. When necessary, we apply for an emergency authorisation.



European agricultural policy and Common Market Organisation: strengthening social support

The challenge?

With the arrival of the new European Commission and the new Commissioner for Agriculture, the EU's attitude towards agriculture changed. Commission President Ursula von der Leyen was strongly committed to dialogue and recognized the strategic and crucial role of agriculture and horticulture as food producers.

How did VBT make a difference?

VBT asserted itself in Europe at various forums and representations. We strongly believe that – in this globalised world – the EU is the most appropriate level to tackle the problems of the fruit and vegetable sector.

Flanders has always been a leader in a cooperative approach to the market. In 1996 we, VBT and LAVA, were the pioneers in the development of the Common Market Organisation (CMO). In 2024, we were extensively involved in the CMO's future plans.

We remain convinced that the instrument of the CMO is invaluable in strengthening the position of the farmer in the chain through a strong horizontal concentration.

In addition, many tasks have been added for the producers' organisations in the meantime. They must spend at least 15% of the operational programme on environmentally friendly measures and 2% on research and development. As a cooperative fruit and vegetable sector in Flanders, we are succeeding in meeting these challenges. We hope that through these efforts we will further strengthen social support for our sector in society.

Public promotion: taking Princess Astrid to Norway

The challenge?

We see that the consumption of fruit and vegetables is decreasing. In the long term, this can pose a serious threat to public health. It is the duty of VBT to continue to focus on a strong promotion of our products both at home and abroad.

How did VBT make a difference?

VBT plays a very active role in the promotion of fruit and vegetables. To this end, we work together with VLAM (Vlaams Centrum voor Agro- en Visserijmarketing), the centre of expertise par excellence for the promotion of fruit and vegetables. The fruit and vegetable sector allocated a total of 3.4 million euros in promotional budget in 2024. This money was spent domestically (campaigns) and abroad (trade fair participations and other events).

Good, consistent promotion of fruit and vegetables requires a rigid approach at EU level – and not just administratively. The expertise built up by VLAM is of enormous importance for this promotion, VBT took on a connecting role. In the spring of 2024, we even received the support of Princess Astrid and the Flemish government during an economic mission to Norway.

The EU has a major influence on the support of promotional campaigns in countries outside the EU, such as China or Brazil. For this, the EU provided a significant co-financing of 80% in 2024. Within international partnerships, VBT contributed to the optimal use of these European resources and an accurate elaboration of the promotional campaigns.



Export: breaking down international barriers

The challenge?

In 2024, international trade was under pressure due to global turmoil on the world stage. Attacks by the Houthi rebels in the Red Sea disrupted the shipping traffic and the geopolitical conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East created uncertainty in the markets, together with the unpredictability of the newly elected president in the US. All these factors sometimes tempted to retreat to the existing and familiar markets.

How did VBT make a difference?

VBT continued to look for suitable openings in promising markets. International trade and export of our products are vital for our sector in the long term. However, it takes years of effort to demolish phytosanitary barriers and to be able to open a market. VBT therefore keeps its eyes open for opportunities to be able to operate quickly and efficiently in any new market.



Transparency in the trade in fruit and vegetables: golden data

The challenge?

The theme of transparency was central to the farmers' protests of spring 2024. As early as 2016, Commissioners Ph. Hogan and C. Veerman concluded in their report "Agricultural Markets Taskforce" that combating unfair trade practices and setting up producers' organisations are an appropriate response to this.

How did VBT make a difference?

VBT possesses a treasure of data on the sale of fruit and vegetables. In 2024 – as every year – we made this data transparently available to our members, but also to the Flemish and European governments. After all, we are convinced that in the long term the market benefits from more transparency. This is also reflected in the way we offer our products, especially in the vegetable sector. The auction clock remains the central element for the coordination of supply and demand.

VBT played a central role in the preparation of the production area estimates and harvest forecasts at Flemish and international level. Together with WAPA (World Apple and Pear Association), Copa-Cogeca and VBT are organising the European harvest forecasts for apples and pears. As a sector organisation, we also play an active role in the organisation of Interpera (in collaboration with AREFLH – Assemblée des Régions Européennes Fruitières, Légumières et Horticoles).

Producers' organisations are crucial to ensure transparency and they also provide strong protection against unfair trading practices. Especially in Flanders, with a sectoral organisation rate of 92% in producers' organisations, VBT as an umbrella organisation can have a positive impact on the further evolution of the sector.

To be continued in 2025



*Cooperation provides
valuable economies of scale*

Marc



*Thanks to the cooperative,
we have been able to make many
sustainable investments*

Nathalie



*As a cooperative,
we are a guarantee
for our growers*

Hilde & Danny



*Being part of a cooperative gives
you an edge over others*

Dirk

“Only together can we compete against greater forces”

“Our sector no longer has the luxury of competing with each other in Flanders. We have to work together,” says **Marc Smets**, chairman of BelOrta, the largest fruit and vegetable cooperative in Belgium. He firmly believes in the power of the cooperative.

“I have been a tomato grower for 35 years and all that time I have received the same price for my product, while spending continues to increase. Larger forces are trying to drag us into a downward price spiral and policy has not made it easy for us in the past ten years either. But we must not let ourselves be played off against each other. As growers and cooperatives, we have to pull together. Only by joining forces can we resist,” Marc Smets does not shy away from strong language. The sector is facing major challenges, and it can only meet them by working together.

Speaking up when it matters

And that’s what the cooperatives do. In VBT, BelOrta, Coöperatie Hoogstraten, REO and INGRO join forces squared. By speaking with one voice as VBT, the interests of the cooperatives and their growers are defended more fiercely. “You have to be present at every policy or sector meeting at the different levels, and that is only possible thanks to VBT. A significant part of those meetings is often not important, but you have to speak up at the important ones. The trick is to know where and when to be alert. General Secretary of VBT Luc Vanoirbeek has an excellent command of this art. He also has an extensive network and in-depth knowledge of the sector. It takes many years to build that up. You don’t just pick someone like him off the street. Luc knows exactly how and where to open doors. Because he combines our four cooperatives in one vote, he can also carry more weight. We would have achieved much less on our own.”

Slavery?

In 2024, at the request of BelOrta, among others, VBT took a stand in the GLOBALG.A.P. GRASP file. The quality label demanded by the retail sector is becoming stricter every year, and now imposed additional social obligations regarding personnel policy. “There are more and more administrative burdens, which raises the threshold for hiring new employees, and we are already having such a hard time finding workers. In addition, labour legislation in Belgium is already very strictly controlled. Slavery? I’m sorry, but that doesn’t exist here anymore. The



additional requirements set by GLOBALG.A.P. are simply absurd for Belgium.”

Offering a product together

In addition to the meeting rooms, the cooperatives within VBT also work very closely together on the auction floor. “The sales take place through a common channel, so that buyers can purchase from multiple auctions at the same time. Does a buyer need more of a certain product? Then they can also buy from Coöperatie Hoogstraten or REO, and vice versa. We are strongly connected.”

“Cooperation also provides economies of scale. For example, the technically outdated clock system will soon be replaced by a modern digital auction system, which will be installed simultaneously at each cooperative.”

*VBT bundles
cooperatives in one voice
and thus has a louder
voice at the policy level.
We would have achieved
less on our own*

Long-term perspective

In addition to retail and regulatory pressures, the sector remains sensitive to external factors such as weather and economic fluctuations. Within this erratic climate, BelOrta offers an important security to its growers: “Two weeks after the sale, the amount is in the growers’ account. If you are on your own, accounting is an extra job in itself. And what if you then have to deal with a defaulter? In the cooperative you get a guarantee. In the future, we hope that our growers will also be able to obtain more certainty regarding investments in the future and the energy transition of their company. Because the current unstable investment climate and policy does not offer a worthy long-term perspective. We are working on this together with the other VBT auctions.”

BELORTA
Producers: 1100
Product turnover: 644 million euros
Top products:
tomatoes, cucumbers, pears

The DNA of cooperatives in the fruit and vegetable sector

The cooperative is:



A guarantee ...

... for quality, availability, food safety, logistical performance, fair sales, sustainability, investments in research and development.

In short, for the reliable and continuous delivery of various benefits that the market demands, and this on a large scale.



Together...

... sharing knowledge, working together as equals, taking steps and helping each other where necessary.

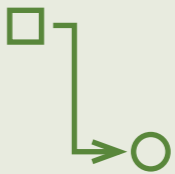
In this way, we pull together and generate benefits for the growers and the market.



Strong...

... as reliable partners throughout the chain. We can use our scale to meet any demand quickly and efficiently.

United in a cooperative, growers have extra clout on the market.



Impact...

... on the trade for the benefit of the horticultural sector. Together, we drive (cultivation) innovation through investments in research and development. The cooperative is the grower’s voice in important debates.

The cooperative formulates answers to challenging questions from the market.



Care...

... for the collective, both economically and socially. With a flourishing future in sight.

The cooperative is much more than collecting and selling products.

“The cooperative offers us security”

What is just about the most important thing a young family with children needs? Right, certainty. Strawberry growers **Nathalie Aertsen** and her husband **Bert Suykerbuyk** find it under the wings of Coöperatie Hoogstraten.

About twelve years ago, Nathalie and her husband made the decision: we are going to be strawberry growers. Starting from one greenhouse, they built a full-fledged agricultural business, their dream. Today, they produce about 400 tons of strawberries every year, good for 800,000 500-gram trays. From the end of March to mid-December, they deliver their entire crop of that day every day – except on Sunday – to Coöperatie Hoogstraten, where their strawberries are auctioned. The producers’ cooperative is a stone’s throw from their farm, just under a 10-minute drive by tractor. “Thanks to the auction, we are always sure of the sales of our product. The strawberries we bring are sold and delivered. That financial security is very important to us.”

The cooperative is an important pillar in every area of our business operations



Open door

The size of sales varies from day to day. The peaks are highest in April and May. But in the winter of 2024, Nathalie and Bert produced nothing at all. Due to the soaring gas prices, they decided to skip a crop. “High energy prices are a theme that is very much alive among colleagues. Last winter it became very expensive again to heat our greenhouses and so we decided not to start. At the cooperative’s New Year’s reception, I spoke to our director Hans about it and he immediately invited me in for a conversation. We appreciate that open door and the willingness to look for solutions together – hopefully we will find them.”

New Year’s reception

At the New Year’s reception, Coöperatie Hoogstraten invites all its members to come together. Over the years, it has proven to be an important anchor point in the cooperative for Nathalie and Bert. “A long time ago, we got to know a group of fellow growers from the neighborhood at the New Year’s reception and in the meantime we have become a real group of friends. We are in a WhatsApp group together and meet regularly. You go through the same situations and understand each other’s concerns, it’s a valuable friendship. Hoogstraten really does its best to stir up the group feeling.”

Bumblebee nests

Membership in the cooperative is also an administrative relief for individual growers. “We are audited every year as part of

GLOBALG.A.P. – a quality certificate. The auction takes care of a lot of paperwork for us, just like for the European subsidies from the Common Market Organisation (CMO). We can only rely on those funds because we are part of a cooperative and Hoogstraten arranges all the paperwork to use those resources. For example, we have already been able to make various sustainable investments here, such as the installation of bumblebee nests in the greenhouses for better, natural pollination of the plants.”

Fridges

Coöperatie Hoogstraten even takes care of the strawberry plants themselves. “For the highest quality strawberries, it is best to only use your plants for one year. So we are constantly growing new plants for the next crop. To ensure that they get through the winter as well as possible, we store them in the cooperative’s refrigerators where they are frozen at a constant temperature. We will collect them again in the spring. Those fridges are another investment and worry less for us. The cooperative is really an important pillar in every area of our business operations, it provides us with enormous benefits.”

HOOGSTRATEN

Producers: 165

Product turnover: 354 million euros

Top products:

strawberries, tomatoes, bell peppers

“Cooperatives are an engine for horticulture”

“Individually you can be as strong as you want, together you always get further,” Minister of Agriculture Jo Brouns emphasizes his belief in the power of the cooperatives. “Especially in horticulture, where markets are becoming increasingly complex and the pressure on sustainability and innovation is increasing. Cooperatives not only offer growers economies of scale, but also a powerful voice in the food chain.”

VBT is an example of this, according to Minister Brouns. “In Flanders, more than 80% of fruit and vegetable growers work together within a producer organisation. Thanks to this connection, they strengthen their position in the market, invest in innovation and help build a sustainable future. Moreover, these cooperatives join forces in VBT, making Flanders one of the best-organised regions in Europe in terms of fruit and vegetable production.”

What makes cooperatives so powerful? For Brouns, it revolves around four pillars:

1. A strong market position

“Together you are stronger. By uniting, growers can approach the market as one, strengthen their negotiating position and negotiate better prices and conditions. This not only gives them more clout against buyers, but also increases their competitiveness, both nationally and internationally.”



2. Innovation and knowledge sharing

“Cooperatives are breeding grounds for innovation. Horticulturists exchange knowledge, test new technologies and develop more sustainable production methods together. Thanks to their close cooperation with Flemish research institutions, our fruit and vegetable sector continues to play a role at the European top.”

3. Resilience through risk diversification

“Horticulture is and remains a sector with many uncertainties, from erratic weather conditions to market fluctuations. Cooperatives help growers to spread risks and to better arm themselves against unforeseen circumstances. That makes the sector as a whole more resilient and financially stable.”

4. Sustainability as a guiding principle

“The challenges around sustainability are great, but cooperatives make joint investments in precision agriculture, circular systems and energy-saving innovations feasible. In this way, the ecological footprint of the sector is reduced, without sacrificing returns.”

2025 has been declared the year of cooperatives by the United Nations. A perfect time to underline once again how important cooperation is. “Flanders has always played a pioneering role in this. Reaching out to each other is in the DNA of our horticulturists. Let’s continue to harness that power—not just in 2025, but well beyond.”

“REO is more than an auction, REO is a partner of its growers”

REO from Roeselare supports its members with fair prices, market access and a wide range of services, from certification and innovation to administrative guidance and sales security.

“REO is all about security and continuity,” says vice-chairman **Dirk Declercq**, a grower himself of curled endive, among other crops. “Our members must be able to count on their product being sold at a fair price. The auction is the guarantee.” REO mediates between growers and buyers and guides them through the increasingly stringent requirements of the market. “Certifications such as GLOBALG.A.P. and Vegaplan are must-haves.” In order to be allowed to sell your produce at REO, Vegaplan certification is mandatory. The certificate guarantees food safety, environmental care and traceability throughout the chain. “For the growers, this means that they have to demonstrate that they meet strict standards,” says Dirk. “Our specialists guide them through

the audits and help with the administrative obligations, and make sure they don’t drown in the paperwork.”

On top of that the market is increasingly demanding additional certifications such as GLOBALG.A.P. and GRASP, especially the retail sector. “It is a challenge, but at the same time an opportunity for our producers to showcase their efforts in food safety and sustainability,” says Dirk. “By organizing certification properly, we create a head start for our growers.”

Innovation and sustainability

The cooperative invests in research into sustainable technologies, such as weed control with robots and precision agriculture. “It’s not just about machines, but also about efficiency and future-oriented work,” Dirk explains. “Growers have to invest to keep up with the increasingly strict standards, and we support them in that.”

Sustainability is playing an increasingly important role in the sector. “VBT has played an important role in the start-up of sustainability reporting,” says Dirk. “We now report much more transparently on our impact. As a result, it is hardly a problem anymore, because we handle the data well and respond proactively to new requirements.”

One of REO’s major strengths is the strong network between the growers. “We know each other. I know at least 500 of our 700 members personally,” says Dirk. There are regular meetings,



Our members want to grow, not get lost in paperwork. We ensure that they can do what they are good at

information sessions and WhatsApp groups in which experiences are shared. “Our members are at the same time competitors and colleagues of each other: everyone wants the best price, but together we are stronger.”

VBT connects and strengthens

Within Belgium and Europe, the cooperative plays a vital role in the sector-wide representation of interests. Dirk: “VBT is the glue between all cooperatives. It ensures equivalence in prices and defends our interests in negotiations with governments, international certification organisations and other stakeholders. The big advantage is that VBT speaks on behalf of more than 2,000 growers. This puts us in a much stronger position in conversations about regulations, sustainability and food safety. It is our advocate, the engine behind fair agreements and innovation.”

The cooperative continues to evolve and support its members in all possible areas. Dirk: “Our members want to grow, not get lost in paperwork or uncertainty. We make sure they can do what they are good at, while REO takes care of the rest.”

REO
Producers: 700
Product turnover: 249 million euros
Top products:
tomatoes, leeks, chicory, strawberries



Organisational structure of VBT

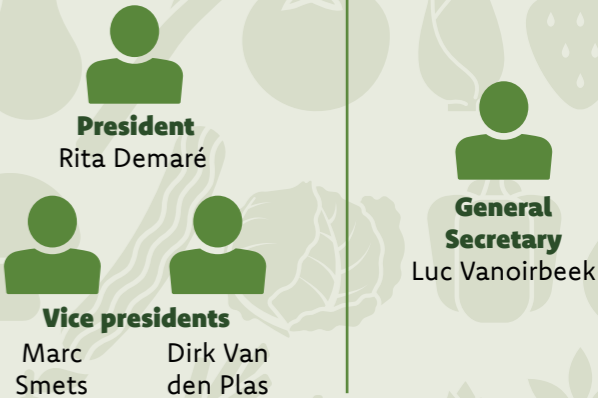
As a non-profit association, we give our members a say and control through representatives in the general assembly, the governing body and various working groups.

In 2024, the general assembly took place on 22 May and there were seven meetings of the governing body, prepared within the management committee and coordinated by the chairman and the general secretary.

Specific dossiers are shared with the members in various working groups and/or ad hoc consultation moments:

- taskforce Simultaneous
- taskforce Production and Sales (P&A)
- taskforce Sustainability
- taskforce Logistics and Packaging
- sounding board group MAP
- Growers’ Advisory Council for Crop Protection.

The secretariat, under the direction of the general secretary is responsible for the day-to-day operations.



Governing body

Ludo Adriaensen, Didier Algoet, Philippe Appeltans, Karel Bosschaerts, Guy Callebaut, Dirk Declercq, Chris Devroe, Hilde Dhuyvetter, Peter Lenaerts, Maarten De Moor, Pieter Van Oost, Danny Raskin, Filip Vanaken, Hans Vanderhallen, Wim Vertommen

“Shoulder to shoulder we have more impact”

For twenty years, INGRO has been making vegetable growers for the frozen food industry stronger. The cooperative from Roeselare offers its 800 West Flemish members a stable price, access to the market and support in the field of joint purchasing, innovative technologies, subsidy applications and administrative relief.

“INGRO focuses exclusively on frozen products,” says director **Hilde Dhuyvetter**. The cooperative negotiates with the industry on behalf of its growers and guarantees a stable and fair price. In addition, INGRO minimizes the risk of default by acting as an intermediary. “We are a guarantor for our members – feel free to call it a credit insurance that guarantees that the grower will be paid. We are not a real auction for fresh products like fellow townsman REO – which many of our members are also part of for their fresh products.”

The scale gives INGRO leverage to obtain European subsidies for sustainable investments through the Common Market Organisation (CMO). Vice-president **Danny Metsu**: “For example, we bought EcoRobotix spot sprayers with which we reduce the use of herbicides by 90% and of planting and hoeing machines. Our members can use these sprayers, which are operated by qualified contractors, at a democratic price. Individual growers cannot bear the cost of such cutting-edge technology for precision agriculture, but together we can take on a pioneering role. On top of that, our members can pick up machines such as a flail mower or disc harrow from one of the four machine hubs in West Flanders.”

Social network

A cooperative is also a social network whose members take care of each other. Danny: “For a few years now, we have been organising company visits for young growers. A great success. Our members exchange experiences and learn from each other – so they no longer work in isolation. This was not yet the case when we were founded in 2005, but now everyone realizes that we have more impact in just about all areas by standing shoulder to shoulder.”

Because INGRO’s growers work exclusively in the open air, they are at the mercy of the whims of nature. Climate change, the restrictions on crop protection products and fertilization are not trump cards. “But sitting still is not in our dictionary,” says Hilde. “We are facing quite a few challenges for which there are not always solutions. As a cooperative, we are constantly



Individual growers cannot bear the cost of cutting-edge technology for precision agriculture. But together we can



working with research and practice institutions to find new techniques and new products. And together with VBT, we inform and advise national and European policymakers.”

Unburdening every aspect

To buffer the increasing vagaries of the weather – too dry, too wet, too cold, too hot – INGRO offers harvest insurance. “Of course, it is more interesting to take out such insurance with a group of 800 than individually,” Hilde points out. It is yet another example of how the cooperative wants to unburden its members in every aspect of business operations. Danny: “Even if audits are carried out at our growers in function of certification, we offer support to ensure that everything runs as correctly and smoothly as possible.”

Clout

Consolidation in the sector is reducing the number of members, but not the strength of INGRO. Danny: “We are growing thanks to the price increases that we can negotiate as a cooperative. This allows us to broaden our services. That gives us the courage to always go further and do better.”

INGRO
Producers: 800
Product turnover: 155 million euros
Top products:
cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, leeks, beans



Cooperatives make the world a better place, but the world doesn't get it. Yet.

Lennart Nilsson, Chairman of Cogeca, the strongest interest group for European agricultural cooperatives, considers cooperatives to be crucial links for a sustainable future.

2025 has been declared by the United Nations as the International Year of Cooperatives – a year to celebrate the power of cooperatives in sustainable development. Agricultural cooperatives, especially in the fruit and vegetable sector, are key players in this transformation. VBT is a valued, active member of the fruit and vegetable working group of Copa-Cogeca and takes on a crucial role in strengthening the cooperative approach within the food chain.

More clout for the producer

Agri-cooperatives empower producers by providing them with better market access, resources and fair prices. They help farmers increase their income by reducing production costs, improving marketing opportunities and investing in essential infrastructure, such as packaging facilities and cold storage. At the same time these cooperatives are committed to environmentally friendly methods, contributing to a sustainable future for agriculture.



Cooperatives strengthen economy

At Cogeca, we recognize the great value of horticultural cooperatives in the transition to a fairer and more sustainable food system. These cooperatives not only strengthen the economy, but also play a key role in tackling global challenges such as food security, climate change and biodiversity conservation.

The positive impact of European agri-cooperatives on producers, the competitiveness of the sector, the environment and society is enormous. Our challenge is to make the cooperative model better known and better understood.

Ensuring growth

To ensure their survival and growth, EU policymakers need to support the unique structure and needs of agri-cooperatives. By driving innovation and implementing policies that promote sustainable practices – such as energy efficiency, climate action and digital infrastructure – we ensure that cooperatives remain resilient and competitive.

Let's stand together behind these cooperatives that feed us, our communities and our planet. Investing in them is investing in a sustainable future for everyone.

REPRESENTATION AT HOME AND ABROAD

As a sector organisation, VBT represents its members in numerous organisations in Belgium and abroad. We consult with relevant parties, interpret common positions and defend the interests of our members.

European Commission’s Directorate General for Agriculture and Rural Development (DG AGRI)

- Civil Dialogue Group (CDG) on Horticulture, Olives and Spirits
- Market Observatory Pipfruit
- Market Observatory Tomatoes



Federal Public Services

- Advisory Committee of the Federal Agency for the Safety of the Food Chain (FASFC)
- Advisory Council and the Plant Fund of the Federal Public Service Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment (FOD Volksgezondheid)
- Taskforce Export Agrifood led by the Federal Public Service Foreign Affairs



Promotion

- Vlaams Centrum voor Agro- en Visserijmarketing (VLAM)



Agentschap Landbouw en Zeevisserij van de Vlaamse overheid

- Strategische Adviesraad voor Landbouw en Visserij (SALV)
- Werkgroepen Oogstramingen
- Werkgroepen Gewasbescherming Kleine Teelten
- Sectorgroepen Integrated Pest Management (IPM)
- Raad van het Vlaams Fonds voor Landbouw en Visserij



Research

- Vlaams Centrum voor Bewaring van Tuinbouwproducten (VCBT)
- Optiflux
- Agentschap Innoveren & ondernemen



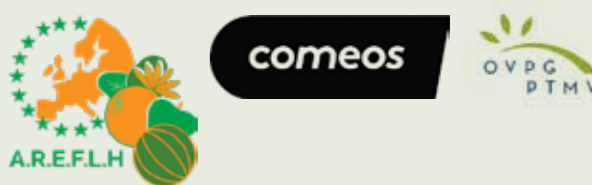
Quality systems

- GLOBALG.A.P.
- Qualität und Sicherheit (QS)
- Vegaplan



Agri-food chain

- Assemblée des Régions Européennes Fruitières, Légumières et Horticoles (AREFLH)
- Comeos
- Overlegplatform voor de Verwerking van en handel in Plantaardige Grondstoffen en producten (OVPG)



Further in Belgium

- GS1 Belgilux
- Nationale Raad voor de Coöperatie (NRC)
- Vlaams infocentrum land- en tuinbouw (Vilt)



International

- Copa-Cogeca – Working Group Fruit & Vegetables
- Freshfel Europe
- World Apple and Pear Association (WAPA)



2024 in numbers

In 2024 the volume of produced and sold products decreased. Supplies of vegetables lowered by 4% and for fruit by almost 3%. Nevertheless, turnover increased by 6% for vegetables and by 16% for fruit. In total, we achieved a record turnover of 1.26 billion euros in the fresh market and 155 million euros in the frozen food market (INGRO). That record turnover does not mean record profits.

Rising sales are counterbalanced by rising production costs of companies and increasingly stringent production requirements. More than ever, we as fruit and vegetable producers must therefore unite in cooperatives and together offer the necessary counterweight. VBT is already taking the lead.

Apple	<div><div>million</div><div>KG</div></div> <div><div>million</div><div>€</div></div> <div><div></div><div></div></div>			
	2020	102	50	0,49
	2021	96	42	0,43
	2022	116	35	0,30
	2023	85	37	0,44
	2024	70	42	0,60

Strawberry	<div><div>million</div><div>KG</div></div> <div><div>million</div><div>€</div></div> <div><div></div><div></div></div>			
	2020	48	192	3,97
	2021	50	194	3,88
	2022	49	175	3,58
	2023	45	181	4,02
	2024	48	225	4,68

Cauliflower	<div><div>million</div><div>#</div></div> <div><div>million</div><div>€</div></div> <div><div></div><div></div></div>			
	2020	8	8	0,98
	2021	8	6	0,71
	2022	7	7	0,93
	2023	7	8	1,18
	2024	7	8	1,16

Zucchini	<div><div>million</div><div>#</div></div> <div><div>million</div><div>€</div></div> <div><div></div><div></div></div>			
	2020	34	8	0,24
	2021	33	8	0,24
	2022	31	10	0,33
	2023	36	9	0,25
	2024	34	12	0,37

Cucumber	<div><div>million</div><div>#</div></div> <div><div>million</div><div>€</div></div> <div><div></div><div></div></div>			
	2020	183	52	0,28
	2021	186	55	0,29
	2022	168	75	0,45
	2023	226	68	0,30
	2024	223	102	0,46

Lettuce	<div><div>million</div><div>#</div></div> <div><div>million</div><div>€</div></div> <div><div></div><div></div></div>			
	2020	63	25	0,39
	2021	60	24	0,39
	2022	57	25	0,43
	2023	51	28	0,55
	2024	39	20	0,52

Mushroom	<div><div>million</div><div>KG</div></div> <div><div>million</div><div>€</div></div> <div><div></div><div></div></div>			
	2020	8	17	2,14
	2021	7	16	2,31
	2022	7	16	2,33
	2023	6	16	2,56
	2024	7	18	2,73

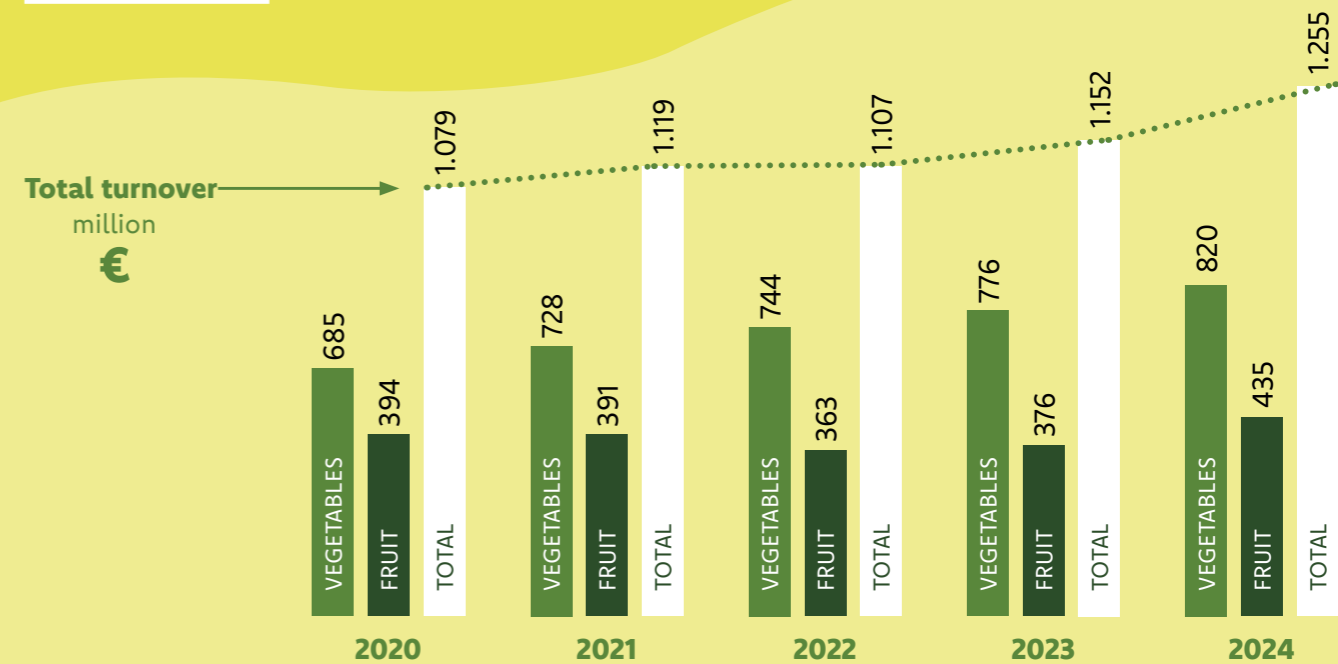
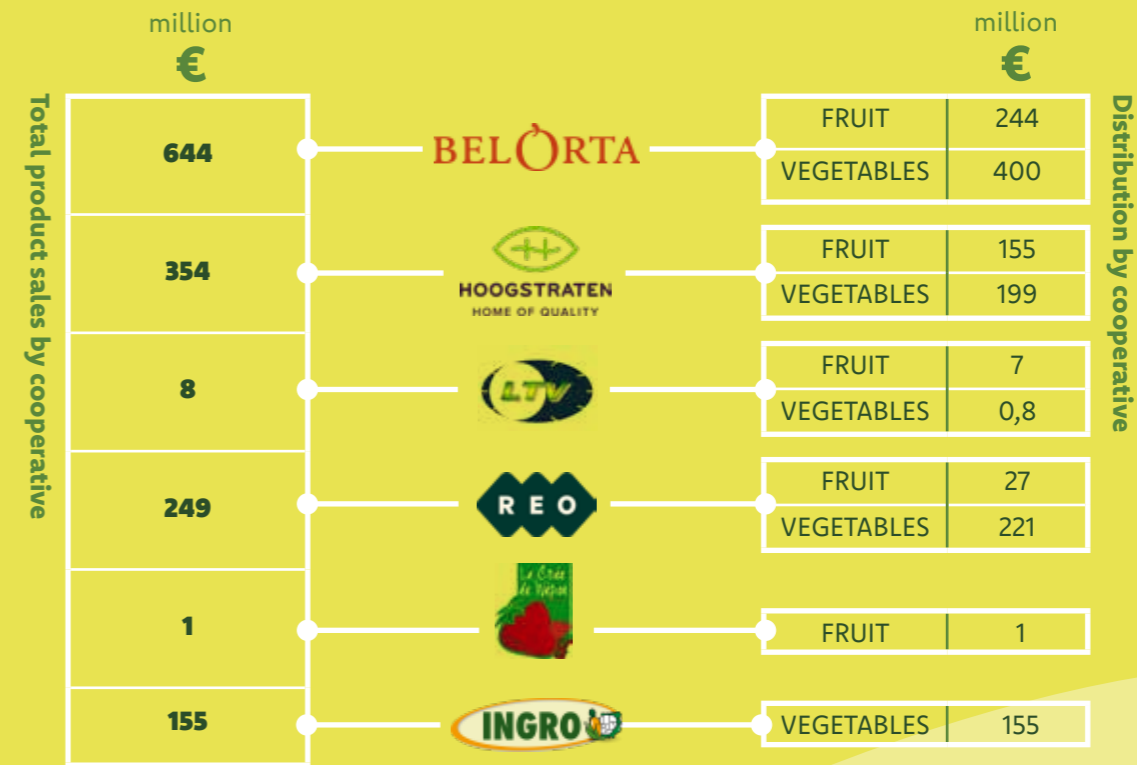
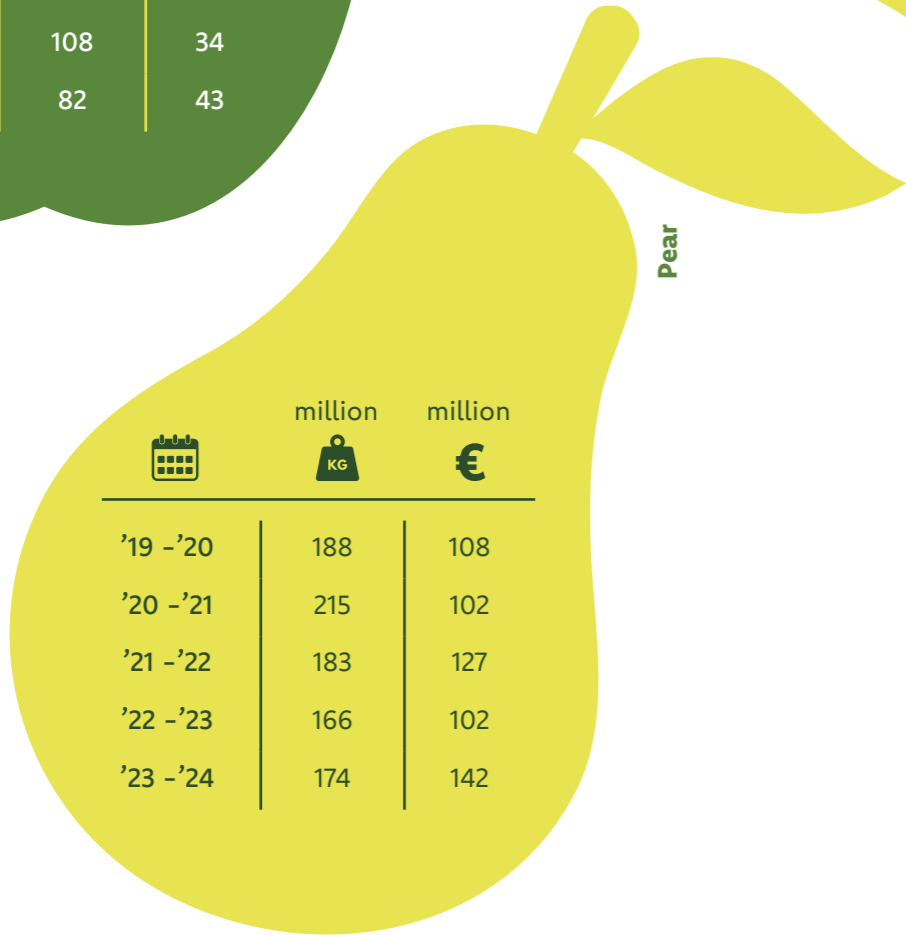
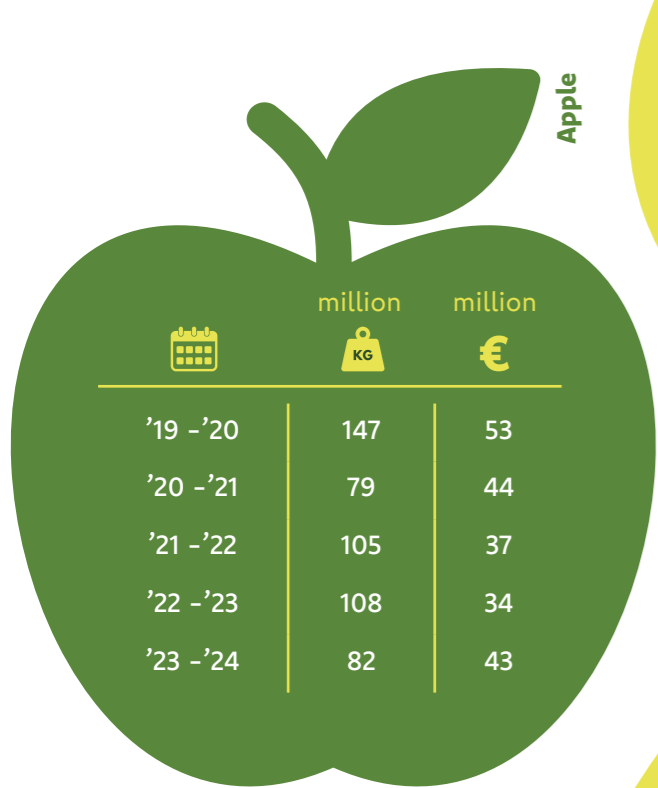
Pear	<div><div>million</div><div>KG</div></div> <div><div>million</div><div>€</div></div> <div><div></div><div></div></div>			
	2020	192	108	0,56
	2021	213	120	0,56
	2022	186	113	0,60
	2023	153	116	0,76
	2024	161	135	0,84

Leek	<div><div>million</div><div>KG</div></div> <div><div>million</div><div>€</div></div> <div><div></div><div></div></div>			
	2020	58	29	0,50
	2021	52	44	0,85
	2022	49	22	0,45
	2023	48	40	0,85
	2024	43	35	0,81

Bell pepper	<div><div>million</div><div>KG</div></div> <div><div>million</div><div>€</div></div> <div><div></div><div></div></div>			
	2020	48	58	1,22
	2021	49	58	1,19
	2022	52	65	1,25
	2023	51	72	1,40
	2024	44	63	1,41

Tomato	<div><div>million</div><div>KG</div></div> <div><div>million</div><div>€</div></div> <div><div></div><div></div></div>			
	2020	266	173	0,65
	2021	225	196	0,87
	2022	214	202	0,94
	2023	214	198	0,92
	2024	210	94	0,92

Chicory	<div><div>million</div><div>KG</div></div> <div><div>million</div><div>€</div></div> <div><div></div><div></div></div>			
	2020	38	59	1,54
	2021	38	47	1,23
	2022	38	42	1,12
	2023	34	57	1,71
	2024	31	65	2,11





ASSOCIATION OF BELGIAN HORTICULTURAL COOPERATIVES

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