



By Tom Joyce

Thursday 7th February 2019, 9:15 GMT

Eosta busts organic myths

The Dutch firm argues organics can feed the world, as long as fertile land is used wisely, soil quality is protected and waste and distribution issues are tackled



One of the greatest myths surrounding organic agriculture is that it cannot possibly feed the world, and certainly not a world set to reach 9.7bn by 2050. According to Michaël Wilde, sustainability and communications manager at Dutch organics specialist Eosta, this myth is based on the fact that studies have shown that organic production is, on average, around 18 per cent less productive than conventional.

"However, remove your 2019-tinted glasses, look ahead to the future, and you'll find that by 2030 organic production has surpassed conventional in terms of productivity," says Wilde. "That is because organics feed and protect the soil, while the artificial fertilisers used in conventional farming affect the living environment in the soil, killing the bacteria."

Protecting the planet

As time goes by, Wilde says, the soil in conventional agriculture becomes less and less productive. "We must stop killing the soil, which contains around

9bn microorganisms," he says. "I'm not advising everyone to switch to organic production, but I do want everyone to start protecting the soil. At the moment, we are losing 30 soccer fields of fertile soil every minute, according to the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation."

Wilde says that the principal reason for which organics are attacked, their supposed inability to feed a rapidly rising global population, is simply inaccurate. "The fact is, right now we produce enough food for a population of 9bn," he says. "Given that the current population is just 7.5bn, the real issue appears to be distribution and waste. However, we first need to look at what we're growing on the available land. In the US, for example, around three-quarters of the world's farmed land is in fact used to produce animal feed or fuel. There is a huge issue here."

At the same time, Wilde is keen to avoid playing organics off against conventional produce. "We want to get away from the idea of conventional versus organic, and encourage people to eat more fresh produce of all kinds in

order to improve their health and the health of the planet, and we want to persuade farmers to collaborate more in order to improve practices together," he says. "At Eosta, we are focused on sustainability rather than just organics. It's about step-by-step sustainable approaches. Every company and individual needs to look at how they can become more sustainable, and organics are definitely a part of this."

According to Wilde, the latest UN climate report, which alarmingly gives us around 12 years to limit climate change catastrophe, has motivated everyone at Eosta. "We need smart agriculture," he says. "In South Africa, our organic grape growers survived the drought far better than conventional farmers in the same areas. They were even supplying water to their conventional neighbours. What's more, in flood conditions, the water drains better on organic farms and therefore doesn't flood the crops. So we can see that sustainable farming practices are also climate-smart."

Health angle

<http://www.fruitnet.com/americafruit/article/1474/parts-of-san-diego-quarantined-as-psyllid-count-mounts>

© Copyright Market Intelligence Ltd - Fruitnet.com 2014. The copyright on this article and all content published on Market Intelligence Ltd - Fruitnet.com is held by Market Intelligence Ltd - Fruitnet.com Limited, a joint venture between Market Intelligence Limited and Dr Rolf M Wolf Media GmbH. All rights reserved. Neither this article nor any part of it may be reproduced, stored or transmitted in any form, including print-outs, screen grabs and information retrieval systems, without the prior permission of the copyright owners.

The environmental benefits of organic agriculture are at the forefront of Eosta's marketing, yet many consumers choose organic for reasons of personal health. The fact is, according to Wilde, if you ask a consumer which is healthier out of conventional and organic, they will say organic. "That is already the perception," he says, "even though in the scientific community there is still some discussion on the subject. So we choose to focus our attention on the impact on soil, biodiversity and climate."

Non-profit organisation Pesticide Action Network has estimated that the number of people affected annually by short- and long-term pesticide exposure is between 1m and 41m, while studies in developed countries have also shown that annual acute pesticide poisoning affects nearly 1 in every 5,000 agricultural workers. Stories like these have been a major influence on the purchasing decisions of well-informed consumers and have assisted the rise of organics.

For over a decade, demand for organics has been growing steadily, according to Wilde. "This is what you want," he says, "as steady growth can be met in a controlled manner. The UK saw a decline following the economic crisis, but this was mainly a result of retailers removing organic products from their shelves, while in Scandinavia we have seen a flattening out after a period of immense growth. However, in general the growth has been gradual. Millennials and Generation X are buying more organic products than previous generations, and the expectation is that they will pass these attitudes on to their own children."

For Eosta, Europe is the main market, and Wilde still sees potential in places like France, Austria,

Germany, Switzerland and Scandinavia. "We do a bit in North America, as well as in Singapore and Hong Kong, but we don't really want to fly our products around the world, and nor do our consumers," he says. "They are aware of the issue of food miles, and 90 per cent of organic consumers will choose a local Spanish avocado over a Peruvian, for example."

The company's interest in Asia is rather as a source of various products, not least Chinese ginger. "There is some scepticism regarding China, but they have a green agriculture programme out there," says Wilde. "There are people who are just as committed to the environment and health as we are. It's been enjoyable to visit China and find all these things that connect us, certainly more than that which separates us. We have met so many people who are striving for a cleaner planet, just as we are. They're taking small gradual steps in China, but around half of all vegetables are grown there, so the impact of these efforts is huge. They have had a lot of food crises and have had to respond."

According to Wilde, sales of products that are considered superfoods, including ginger and turmeric, are currently doing extremely well. Eosta promotes these through its Dr Goodfood campaign, which is fronted by Anna Kruyswijk, doctor and author of several books on food, health and lifestyle, and aims to encourage consumers to see certain healthy foods as akin to medicine.

"Health comes from good, wholesome food that nature provides us with," says Kruyswijk. "Food with no human tampering or industrial processing. Organic food. Because studies show that organic food holds up to 40 per

cent more active ingredients that benefit our health. Becoming Dr Goodfood is an effective new way for me to help Nature & More promote the medical benefits of food. And hopefully inspire people to choose pears and peppers over pills."

Making healthy affordable

The priority now is to make healthy food relatively more affordable compared with the cheap stuff, adds Wilde, who believes things are heading in the right direction.

"The supermarkets will continue to see the benefits of having a strong organic segment, as consumers are willing to pay more for healthy, sustainable food that protects the environment," he says. "But they no longer see organics as a cash cow, and the gap between organic and conventional prices has narrowed considerably as a result."

The idea of True Cost Accounting, taking into account all the hidden costs of a product, including its impact on the environment and health, will also be an important step for the future, Wilde believes, as it would make many organics cheaper than their conventional counterparts.

"We currently see the Dutch government looking at new taxation models, the UK has introduced a sugar tax, the French have increased taxes on herbicides and there is growing talk of a meat tax," he says. "Meanwhile, subsidies are being offered to young farmers who produce sustainably. So we're seeing a combination of the carrot and the stick being used by governments, and we think True Cost Accounting research can help them in making such crucial decisions in the future."