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By Mike Knowles

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EVS: Veg trade must charm consumers

New event European Vegetable Strategies offers wealth of ideas on how to harness products' commercial potential

The European vegetable business must go on something of a charm offensive in order to convince consumers that its products offer a huge amount in terms of taste, enjoyment and nutrition, while at the same time ensuring that suppliers, scientists and governments work more closely in order to harness the commercial potential of fresh vegetables to offer health and nutritional benefits to consumers.

Those were the stand-out messages from European Vegetable Strategies, a new one-day business forum offering ideas, information and insight for fresh vegetable suppliers, marketers and retailers, which took place at the Hotel Bloom in Brussels on Thursday, 5 June.

"Young consumers want to grow and be strong, so they want to eat vegetables; they want to be healthy," insisted Hans-Jürgen Kirsch, fresh produce category

director of German retail chain Globus, who delivered the event's keynote talk. "Fathers and mothers want to be sure that their kids like what they eat. We have to support this, especially with fresh vegetables."

Kirsch warned against being too prescriptive in marketing vegetables to consumers. "We have to tell people that vegetables and fruits are nice, we are happy with them, it's a real nice story," he said. "But with consumption going down drastically in some segments, we have to re-motivate the customer, develop their contact with vegetables and show that it's a category with a lot of charm."

By the end of the event, which was attended by more than 120 members of the European fresh produce business from all parts of the supply chain, [a call to action demanding closer collaboration between the fresh produce and health industries](#)

had been unanimously approved by delegates.

"We believe the fresh vegetable sector must take a greater role in developing the link between horticulture, nutrition and health," said Jan Doldersum, marketing and business development manager at vegetable seed company Rijk Zwaan.

Among the conference's other major conclusions, speakers and delegates identified a need to back up marketing and communications with the introduction of better new varieties, backed by solid research that place a focus on taste rather than aesthetics.

"Quality is the taste experience of a tomato, not whether or not it's 11mm or 12mm in size," suggested Andrew Burgess, director of agriculture at the UK's leading fresh vegetable supplier Produce World.



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

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According to Filip Fontaine, general manager of Belorta, the largest fresh produce auction in Belgium, one new vegetable product is introduced every fortnight, suggesting producers and marketers are looking to shake up the market with innovative new lines.

On trend

Other key trends identified during the course of the event were an expanding market for convenience products, a rising volume of product being sold via internet grocery channels and the increasing demand among European consumers for local vegetables, with AMI's deputy managing director Hans-Christoph Behr observing that Germany was now starting to produce sweet peppers in glasshouses of its own and compete with imported product.

Delegates were also reminded that mainstream market trends would not necessarily always represent the best opportunities for growth, particularly in the context of developments at the fringes of the modern retail sector.

"In the UK, Aldi and Lidl over-trade on vegetables, and that's also true for Sainsbury's, as well as Waitrose at the premium end of the market," noted Ed Garner, communications director of analyst Kantar WorldPanel. "This is a really good piece of news for veg suppliers given their overall growth."

He added: "Discounters have gone from selling cheap stuff to selling quality stuff cheap. Aldi's trading in fruit and veg is 21 per cent bigger than you would expect from looking at its average share of the total grocery market.

"These outlets are very friendly to the fruit and veg market. Also, they don't promote; it's a smooth sales line and it's easy to keep product in stock without the ups and downs of promotions. But you have to be prepared to supply more next year!"

Garner also sounded a note of warning to any retailer tempted to reduce pack sizes in reaction to a rise in vegetable prices.

"This a situation of real danger for vegetables. The potato market was up 15 per cent in the year to 2 February 2014, but as prices went up retailers started to reduce the pack size, so the volume overall sold was down.

"This is also happening in veg. When prices come down, you have to get the pack size back up or the market is in trouble."