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By Carl  
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## Research pays off for Rijk Zwaan

Rijk Zwaan carried out its own market research in 2020 to ensure it is as prepared as possible for what the coming year will bring

**D**espite the raft of challenges thrown up in 2020, vegetable seed specialist Rijk Zwaan has researched and taken note of the way the industry has changed from both a consumer and customer perspective, and is ready to move forwards in 2021.

“Overall we did quite well in 2020,” confirms Jan Doldersum, manager chain and retail at Rijk Zwaan. “Depending on the crop and the market we saw clear differences in demand and supply at grower level. For instance, melon sales were quite heavily impacted due to a high percentage of use in the out-of-home segment. Growers have planted, and are planting, fewer melons, and the same applies to premium salads like rocket, babyleaf and cornsalads for high-end restaurants and catering.”

At the same time, commodity items and longer shelf-life crops, such as brassicas, peppers, aubergines and tomatoes, have seen an upturn in fortunes, with

Doldersum noting a 15-20 per cent increase in retail sales. This growth compensated, to a certain degree, for the losses seen in the Horeca sector.

Rijk Zwaan will be able to lean on key first-hand data when it comes to manoeuvring itself through the next 12 months, having carried out research last summer on the impact of Covid-19 on the fresh supply chain. On the consumer side, the company discovered that key factors include the development of new sales channels like online, fresh and healthy, localism, home cooking (such as meal kits) and affordability. For growers and traders, factors to consider included a fear of recession and the impact of buying power, the quality and availability of labour and a focus on digitalisation.

Most importantly, Rijk Zwaan's clients are now focusing on improving the basics, with product availability and consistency key. The innovation

pipeline is, Doldersum notes, of less importance, which is understandable but, in the long term, could slow down growth in the category.

This does not mean innovation will be ignored – far from it. This year will see Rijk Zwaan present its new CleanLeaf trait in aubergines, a plant with fewer hairs allowing the better application of IPM and use of biological control. “We will also draw attention to Salanova Teenleaf for mechanical harvesting, as well as high density production in hydroponic cultivation. There will be new melon and tomato varieties coming as well with exciting flavours, shapes and colours.”

The group's Sweet Palermo range also continues to generate huge interest worldwide, while Doldersum adds that Rijk Zwaan is setting up various campaigns in different countries. “Soon we will start in Thailand and Malaysia with local partners to share recipes and



With restrictions in place due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, Rijk Zwaan is organising digital events as it seeks innovative ways to reach out to its customers

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engage with their communities, which is very exciting

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