

Recipe for food sovereignty

October 14 2013, by Thijs Westerbeek



The actors of the food supply chain need to adapt their practice to ensure both safe and sustainable production while retaining their say on food sovereignty

The main concern of [food](#) producers has always been to bring safe fruit and vegetables to European plates. But now, expectations have been stepped up one notch as pressure mounted to reduce factors, related to climate change, susceptible to affect the safety of food. Food production is therefore expected to be done in a sustainable way while preserving, or better still, improving food safety. For example, this means ensuring strawberries imported, say, from outside Europe are just as healthy as

they appear to be once they are on our supermarket shelves. Or preventing microbes and fungi, which did not thrive in the colder climate they originated from, to develop in the warmer climate where they have been imported into.

These are precisely the questions that an EU funded project called Veg-i-Trade has been tackling. It involves all the actors of the food supply chain including the farmers, the traders, and those providing transport and packaging. The project's objective is to provide a toolbox to help them all to contribute to fair and [sustainable food production](#).

"We really don't want to simply impose a whole list of rules on the traders and producers. We need the cooperation of all those involved," says project coordinator Mieke Uyttendaele, professor of bio-engineering and microbiology at the department of food safety and [food quality](#) at the University of Ghent in Belgium. "Often it's those local, low-tech solutions that can provide the answer," she adds. For instance if an African farmer no longer keeps his goats next to his field of string-beans the risk of contamination is gone! "That's valuable advice for other farmers," she tells [youris.com](#)

The toolbox [recommendations](#), however, do not need to be overly detailed. "Legislation is already in place, and it doesn't need to be specific for every kind of [fresh produce](#). You can simply advise food growers to keep their livestock at a certain distance from their fields," says Nicolette Quaedvlieg, programme manager for food and health of the Product Board Horticulture in Zoetermeer, the Netherlands.

One of the challenges of the project is more than just [food safety](#), however. Rather, it is also about food sovereignty. "What you cannot expect is that the [project's] recommendations will be applied or accepted quickly by all those concerned if food sovereignty isn't respected. It's the growers, traders and consumers who must have the

final say about their food and food production. [The project] is right to focus on this. Only then can it work in everyday practice,"

The success of the recommendations of the project would depend on another aspect of food sovereignty—namely on whether they are based on the input and on the know-how of the professionals involved. "If the ideas for improvement stem from the growers and traders themselves others will be much more inclined to take the advice." points out Jim Monaghan, principal lecturer in fresh produce at Harper Adams University College in Newport, UK.

"The same thing goes for the consumers. But quite apart from that, the hardest part as far as I am concerned is to find the balance between exact recommendations, and simple ones, if the advice is too complicated it will be ignored, if it's too vague, it won't be effective. Only time will tell if [the [project](#)] succeeds in this respect."

More information: www.veg-i-trade.org/

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