



In its monthly series on the international wholesale scene, the World Union of Wholesale Markets (WUWM) looks at quality as the latest buzzword

Markets take lead on access to top produce



MARKET AUTHORITIES consider that fresh fruit and vegetable consumption in Europe will not increase without concentrated industry attention and commitment towards providing consumers with easy access to quality products.

Wholesale markets are taking a leading role in drawing consumer attention towards the need to purchase high-quality fresh produce – as defined by nutritional content, taste, freshness and sustainability, as well as by physical appearance.

Many members of the World Union of Wholesale Markets (WUWM) are providing additional support to traders of quality product, as well as launching or supporting initiatives and campaigns that increase public education and awareness of quality food and related issues.

UK wholesale markets are playing a key role in food initiatives. The London Food Strategy aims to improve diet and support a vibrant food economy, including the promotion of the capital's diverse food culture. Wholesale

markets are beginning to work with partners to develop the "Local to London" brand. The implementation plan features projects that aim to increase the proportion of local and fairly traded food procured by and offered in London restaurants.

Sustain and the London Food Link have recently launched a substantial five-year programme entitled Making Local Food Work, which includes projects seeking to establish local food distribution hubs – an obvious role for the wholesale market – and to enable community-owned shops and local producers to achieve greater sales of locally produced foods.

There is also a project to improve London's local food infrastructure that directly involves the wholesale markets, by finding ways to meet the increasing demand for and supply of sustainable and locally produced fresh food.

David Smith, director of the City of London markets, pictured above left, said: "Taken in conjunction with the Fresh Produce Consortium's project to support the 5 A DAY initiative with a campaign entitled Eat in Colour, which has reached 85 million people in its first year and achieved 219 different bits of coverage in the media, it shows that fresh, tasty, and by definition 'high-quality' food is definitely on the agenda – and rising rapidly." ○



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viewpoint

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WHAT QUALITY MEANS TO MARKETS

BEFORE WRITING this column, I googled the current meaning of the word "quality" – I wondered if it meant the same thing today as when I went to school. The experience was both worthwhile and interesting. I suggest you try it.

Wikipedia was fairly succinct: "The most progressive view of quality is that it is defined entirely by the customer or end user and is based upon that person's evaluation of his or her entire customer experience." Another, slightly more subdued definition, from ISO, read: "Quality is a desirable characteristic."

Why am I obsessing about the meaning of quality? One of the main fresh produce industry questions of the day would appear to be: how effective are current promotional campaigns in increasing fruit and vegetable consumption, and do we have enough of them? At the risk of being the fly in the ointment, I would ask: is there any point to promotional campaigns urging everyone to buy more fresh fruit and vegetables if the quality, freshness and taste of the products they have access to are questionable?

I live in the Netherlands and it is almost impossible to buy a decent-tasting tomato in this country anymore. They do, however, look beautiful. But does one buy tomatoes because they look beautiful, or to have them taste good and nourish the body? Perhaps fundamentals such as taste and quality should form the basis of future promotional campaigns? The majority of the fresh produce in this country, like many others, is sold to consumers through supermarkets and multiple retailers. At the risk of upsetting the apple cart, the quality of commonly available fresh produce in the Netherlands (in the opinion of this consumer) is quite low – because it is often not that fresh, and it is certainly not that tasty. Modern intensive growing methods do not always make the taste grade with me – tomatoes and cucumbers being just two examples.

The "quality" standards of supermarket fresh produce would mostly seem to favour a long shelf life, bright colours and perfect appearance. Produce is picked when unripe, is frequently grown hydroponically (or in a similar manner), and may come with food miles at levels I would like my frequent flyer statement to reflect. As internationals living in the Netherlands, my food-whinging friends and I are often informed that we probably "care more about these things than nationals do". I disagree – just ask a Dutch national what they enjoyed most on holiday in Spain, France or Italy, and they will tell you it was the weather followed by the food, i.e. the variety, taste, freshness and shopping experience all rolled into one.

As noted by David Smith at the City of London recently, the days when markets were dumping grounds are long past. Market traders and their customers are now acting as the catalysts for the increased provision of quality, fresh food. As it is often domestic produce that we trade in markets, we are also supportive of the local economy and tools for sustainability in the environment. In the opinion of most wholesale market authorities, increased attention to the quality, taste, and freshness of food is the most sensible and effective way to ensure there is a natural, sustainable, consumer-led increase in fresh fruit and vegetable consumption. ○