

Policy Brief EU Access



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Improving quality management in fruit and vegetable production

Quality management license for market access

Fruit and vegetable producers in the new accession countries of the European Union are facing many changes. One of these changes concerns the EU demands regarding liability, traceability (General Food Law) and uniform quality standards or market standards. Another change is the strong increase in sales of fresh fruit and vegetables to supermarkets at the cost of open markets. Supermarkets demand supply security, consumer safety, uniform quality, and insight in production methods. The introduction of quality management systems should enable producers to systematically meet these new demands. Improvement, however, of quality assurance and food safety is not only a matter of programmes and systems. Preconditions are awareness, attitude, knowledge, (chain) organisation and institutional embedding.

Quick Scan Qualiman

The Qualiman project focuses on the improvement of quality management in the fruit and vegetable supply chain. Five organisations from Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and the Netherlands are participating in this project. A quick scan was held in 2004/2005 to identify common grounds of bottlenecks in quality management in the participating countries. The results form the starting point for activities to improve quality management.

In each country, 10 to 15 stakeholders in the supply chains of apples and onions were interviewed. Growers, wholesalers, members of Product Boards, retailers, inspectors and advisors were asked to give their opinion about problems and solutions in the field of quality management in the supply chain. A shared analysis of the interviews gave insight in the common grounds of bottlenecks for all countries. The bottlenecks can be divided into three categories: product quality, quality management, and chain management. The problems concerning product quality are related to the lacking knowledge about EU quality standards, with poor product handling, and unsuitable storage and sorting capacity. The implementation of quality management is limited by insufficient knowledge of quality systems and food safety demands, the lack of motivation at farm level, and the infrastructure for control, residue analysis etc still being in their early stages. At chain level lack of communication, cooperation and strategy impede an efficient and effective chain organisation. The project will be continued in winter 2005/2006 with two pilots with growers in Poland, Hungary and Slovakia.

Pilot 1: Quality Standards tool kit

Many growers in new and future EU Member States have insufficient knowledge of the EU quality standards. So far these growers produce fresh fruit and vegetables for a local open market where this is not a big problem. But the market share of these open markets decreases. The ever stronger position of supermarkets and increasing international trade necessitate transparent standards and knowledge on the use of such standards. This is a condition for an efficient supply chain and for competitive power of growers.

Goal of the pilot is to improve the knowledge of growers about quality requirements in the European Union for which a universal toolkit for training on quality requirements will be developed. This toolkit will inform growers and trainers on the basic quality requirements and the relation of these requirements with international standards and EU legislation. It will contain theoretical information about legislation and quality requirements as well as practical sessions. The toolkit will be tested and evaluated with a group of onion growers in Poland to stimulate the applicability in practice.



Local trainers are aimed as users of the toolkit.
Organisations involved in development and interpretation of market standards like OECD and UNECE show much interest into this approach.



Eurep/GAP certificate

Pilot 2: Quality management

In Slovakia, Poland and Hungary implementation of quality management systems like Eurep-GAP, BRC, HACCP at farm level is still limited to a very small group of pro-active growers. Sometimes these growers make use of foreign capital and knowledge to implement these systems. The large majority of growers has no knowledge at all of quality management systems and neither has experience with such systems. The innovators are too far ahead to inspire the average grower. The lack of knowledge is linked with a lack of motivation. Most growers do not realise that these systems are a license to deliver to supermarkets or export markets and an opportunity to meet demands of the EU General Food Law. Two trainings will be organised in winter 2006 in Slovakia and Hungary to improve the awareness of growers towards the need to work with quality management systems. Bottlenecks and solutions for implementation will be discussed with certified and uncertified growers. This will result in practical solutions and recommendations.

This is the third issue of the Policy Brief of the EU Access programme, a co-operation programme on sustainable agricultural supply chains in pre- and post-European Union accession countries. This programme started at the request of the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality of the Netherlands and is now running in co-operation with partners from Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovak Republic, Romania, Bulgaria and Cyprus.

This quarterly Policy Brief intends to inform you about a specific theme that follows from the EU Access programme. A Newsletter is also published and informs you about new developments around the various projects of the programme. For more information about programme, projects, Newsletter or Policy Brief please contact us (arij.everaarts@wur.nl; phone +31 320 29 11 11).

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Three institutes of Wageningen University and Research Centre are involved in this programme: Applied Plant Research (PPO), International Agricultural Centre (IAC) and Agricultural Economics Research Institute (LEI)

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