

Dutch quinoa in the shops

This year sees Dutch quinoa in the shops for the first time. Wageningen provided suitable varieties and is advising farmers on the cultivation.

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Quinoa has become hugely popular in recent years. According to Ruud Timmer, a crop production researcher and quinoa expert at Wageningen UR, this 'Inca cereal' is an exceptionally healthy product that would fit perfectly in a wholesome diet. 'Quinoa seeds contain approximately twice as much protein as rice,' he explains. 'In addition to high-quality protein, the seeds also contain 'slow carbs', carbohydrates that are absorbed slowly so that blood sugar levels remain stable.'

AT SEA LEVEL

Quinoa originally comes from Bolivia and Peru, where local farmers grow this crop high up in the Andes. Wageningen researchers started plant breeding with quinoa in the 1990s. They developed several quinoa varieties that do well at sea level and with Dutch daylight hours. These new varieties have another advantage. 'The Dutch quinoa is easier to process as its seed coat doesn't contain a bitter substance called saponin,' says Timmer. 'And that saves on costs.' When the UN declared 2013 the 'Year of Quinoa', this 'superfood' was put in the spotlight. Both sales and prices exploded. Rens Kuijten, the founder and director of the Dutch Quinoa Group, took advantage of this trend.

The Dutch Quinoa Group organizes the entire supply chain in the Netherlands: in addition to cultivation, it is also involved in product development, packaging and marketing. Kuijten is a pioneer who has been working with various Wageningen varieties in the Netherlands for about five years. Together with Wageningen UR, the group is now developing more expertise in growing quinoa, and the area under cultivation is expanding steadily. In 2014, 13 affiliated farmers grew 30 hectares of quinoa for the first time. That area

has now increased to 250 hectares. The quinoa grown on Dutch soil is on sale in shops in the Netherlands for the first time this year.

A WAGENINGEN VARIETY

'We are working with the 45 affiliated Dutch farmers to study the yields and seed quality of different varieties under different conditions,' explains Kuijten. 'Together with Wageningen UR, we are looking at such factors as soil type, the optimum plant density and fertilization.'

Cornelis van Eck, a farmer on the island of Goeree-Overflakkee in the southwest Netherlands, grew four hectares of quinoa for the first time this year. 'I used Atlas, a Wageningen variety,' he says. 'It's a robust variety that does well in the Netherlands.' Not only does Atlas have the highest yield, it also gives good ground cover, which stops weeds from growing. The plants also remain upright and are easy to harvest. Van Eck has had a good year. 'Our yields were above average and the quality was excellent. I earn more per hectare from quinoa than from other cereals,' he concludes with a pleased look. 'We need another two to three years to get an idea of all the risks, but I'm very optimistic about this crop.' ■

**'I earn more
from quinoa than
from wheat'**



www.wageningenur.nl/en/quinoa

