



‘Nutrition as medicine requires changes to food supply chain’

There is growing interest in using food products as medicine. What implications does that have for the way in which we produce food? That is the question professor by special appointment Thijs Defraeye (Food Quality & Design) is asking. His thoughts on the matter led to a review article that was published recently.

Food as medicine is one aspect of the up-and-coming field of lifestyle medicine, where healthy diets are used to prevent diseases and help make treatment more effective. Despite this, it is often assumed there is not much money for producers, for example, in nutrition for disease prevention. Defraeye wants to challenge that assumption. He believes there are opportunities for both existing firms and new enterprises. The current food supply chain is set up to give consumers what they want to eat, explains Defraeye. If everyone switched tomorrow to diets in line with the dietary guidelines, there would probably not be enough produce to meet that demand. But history shows that scaling up production is indeed possible, he argues in the article. If healthy food is to become widely available all year round, changes must be made in the associated infrastructure and processing. Processing methods such as drying or freezing can help. The healthy products also need to appeal to consumers, says Defraeye. That means healthy food needs to fit in the consumer’s daily routine and be affordable.

Personalization

Defraeye also sees opportunities in the new market of personalized health services, for example with nutritional advice based on fitness activities recorded in an app or a smartwatch. However, he immediately adds a caveat: ‘More research is needed on the impact of a data-driven, personalized diet as compared to a generally healthy diet.’ ^{DV}