

# Quality management: lessons of Belgian experiences

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Agronomists and bio-engineers are more than ever concerned with the challenge of a healthy diet and it is very important that the dialogue between stakeholders in the sectors (producers, processors, distributors and consumers) can be established to ensure fair value chain. This is precisely the objective of this two-day scientific meeting.

In Europe and all western countries, the food model has changed considerably during the twentieth century. It has been broadly characterized by a race for unprecedented productivity to which agronomists have made outstanding contributions. The corollary was the sharp rise of upstream and downstream production that have acquired a much higher economic weight in the chain. There is also a high proportion of specialized farms and the food consumption side is dominated by mass-produced, standardized, and especially seasonally non adjusted, delocalized and de-territorialized products inducing a break of perceptible links between the consumer and the producer.

The eighties, nineties and early 2000s were characterized by what Henri Cayre called "agro-plenty." The same author pointed out already in 1979 the almost permanent state of imbalance of agriculture. In a world characterized by a civilization crisis in the industry, the continued deterioration of terms of trade for agricultural products is not acceptable. Farm income in link with safety should instead be guaranteed. "Those that have been encouraged to produce should not be victims of the abundance they have had the great merit of creating".

In this context, the issue of global food security should concern all States, particularly the wealthy. It is urgent to reflect on the growing gap between the concerns of some countries where obesity is always gaining ground and those in developing countries where food is still not a fundamental right and where more than one billion people still lack access to essential food for their survival.

The expected path of the world population and the multiple nutritional deficiencies and shortcomings already observed in many developing countries mean that "the specter of famine is arguably much more expectable than the plethora" (Henry Cayre, 1979).

It seems important to bring together expertise and advice to fuel the dialogue on the sensitive issue of agricultural policies. The approach must be interdisciplinary and intersected. The program of this meeting is in this direction since it brings together professionals from several disciplines: engineers, chemists, economists, agronomists, sociologists, lawyers, ...

During the last twenty years, the evolution of the model was further precipitated by the emergence of new players and a reconfiguration of power relations between the various links in the food chain. Retail and purchasing groups have become major players in the organization of industries and markets and have supplanted the traditional operators. Mergers and alliances acquire a true supranational form among the major groups on the distribution and agribusiness upstream and downstream of production with the emphasis, as a result, on the process of concentration and vertical as well as horizontal integration. At the same time health crises cause a proliferation of standards at all stages of food-chains and the role of regulatory bodies is strengthened.

In response to these developments, innovative experiences are emerging and are most often described as "niche projects." They give evidence of some kind of protest against the transformation of the food and reveal social expectations for another model.

The recent reform initiated in the Walloon Region and based on the concept of differentiated quality represents a part of this movement of resistance to a globalizing food model. It is based on better communication with the consumer and greater dialogue with the various links of the main agricultural sectors in Wallonia to consolidate small size farms.

On the other hand, at a time when the Doha round of negotiations on trade liberalization between the 153 members of the World Trade Organization is "once again on the brink of failure," according to the words

of its director, Pascal Lamy, the role of non-tariff barriers is growing in world trade. The reason for consumer protection is often discussed but it is usually a major economic challenge for large multinational food companies.