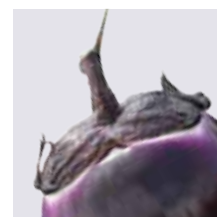


Seeds & Services

THE RIJK ZWAAN CHAINMAIL FOR ALL PARTNERS IN THE CHAIN



'Active in Africa for Africa'

Kruidenier goes for varieties from Sensational Flavours

'Lettuce hydro culture is the future'

Contents

- 2 Kruidenier goes for Sensational Flavours
- 4 Hydro culture: 'Growing system of the future'
- 5 'Super-sustainable crop'
- 6 Spinach in all types and sizes the world over
- 8 Prof. Dr. Ir. Rudy Rabbinge: 'Making better use of available agricultural land'
- 9 Paul Rosenmöller: 'Healthy choices should be easy choices'
- 10 'Active in Africa for Africa'
- 11 Trial Center Tomato helps entire chain in choosing varieties
- 12 Green batavia successful as part of McDonald's menu
- 13 Salanova® breaks through in Japan
- 14 Reacting worldwide to consumers

The RZ Seeds & Services magazine is published in English, Spanish, Dutch, Italian and German by Rijk Zwaan Distribution B.V. It is distributed to chain partners worldwide and has a circulation of 8,000.

Text and editorial team: Rijk Zwaan
 Photography: Rijk Zwaan, Tjipke Meijer
 Lay-out: Do Company, Rotterdam
 Printing: Drukkerij Van Deventer

Reproduction stating source is allowed. RZ Seeds & Services has been created with the greatest care. Nevertheless no liability can or will be accepted for any incorrect information.

Rijk Zwaan Distribution B.V.
 Burgemeester Crezeelaan 40
 P.O. Box 40, 2678 ZG De Lier,
 the Netherlands
 Tel +31 (0)174 53 23 00
 Fax +31 (0)174 51 82 43
 E-mail chainmanagement@rijkszwaan.nl
www.rijkszwaan.com

Kruidenier goes for Sensational Flavours

Interest in 'flavour line' Sensational Flavours continues to grow. More and more companies recognise the added value from a demonstrably special and consistent flavour. One example of this is Kruidenier, a wholesale company that focuses in particular on the food-service market.



▲ Corné Ooms joins Kruidenier in going for the best taste.

Kruidenier supplies around 5,000 buyers every week with a complete package of fresh products, with transparency, reliability and sustainability always as their aim. In order to be able to realise this ambition, Kruidenier makes very clear choices, especially in the area of fruit and vegetables, the sourcing of which is in the hands of InterVers, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Kruidenier. Corné Ooms is the person responsible for this: "We are very selective in the number of quality marks we carry but we're not afraid to totally go for something. That is the case with our bananas, for instance; they always bear the fair trade and organic quality marks – we don't have any other ones."

Fresh approach

In order to also meet its high (own) demands where flavour is concerned, Kruidenier consciously opted for Sensational Flavours, Rijk Zwaan's product line of varieties that stand out with their exceptional taste experience. Ooms explains how contact with Rijk Zwaan came about. "Using the traditional purchasing method, you choose a particular trading company without knowing the growers involved, let alone the varieties. That makes it very difficult to get a grip on flavour. That's why we went back to the source: the seed breeding company. After all, that is where the varieties are developed that form the basis for a good flavour."



Sensational
Flavours



Together with Rijk Zwaan we subsequently selected a group of growers who grow the products for us. Because we know the face behind the name of the grower, we ensure that we have high transparency and short lines. Not only that, when selecting our growers we have sometimes also been able to include sustainability aspects. The ground-heat project of tomato growers Duijvestijn, for instance, is totally in line with our thinking."

From Rijk Zwaan's side, the project was guided by chain manager Maarten van der Leeden. He knows that flavour is a complex phenomenon: "Buyers often fixate too much on Brix values, even though aromatic substances and the taste sensation in the mouth, for instance, play an important part as well. That is why, at Rijk Zwaan, we conduct extensive research into taste and flavour. We combine sensory research by trained taste-test panels with consumer research and laboratory research. Having these three pillars enables us to really underpin the flavour of a variety!" Besides choosing a variety, the

growing method also plays a major role. "Growing a variety for the best flavour result often does not go together with the highest possible production," explains Van der Leeden. "That is another reason why it is an advantage that Kruidenier opts to have a regular group of growers. They know how to get maximum flavour from a variety and they will also be motivated to do so. After all, they consciously chose to grow a variety from the Sensational Flavours line."

Collaboration based on transparency and short lines

Marketing opportunities

Thanks to an ingenious logistical system, Kruidenier is able to supply each customer individually and exactly as required. Recently, its activities have even been extended to include consumers as well. Ooms: "Sales of our fresh



products via the internet are really taking off and fit in very well with our existing logistical system. Because we don't need shelf room, we can deliver products ultra-fresh to consumers. Moreover, this working method offers huge marketing opportunities, as it tells us exactly who our customers are!" Kruidenier is planning, therefore, to regularly include samples of new products in deliveries to its buyers, the latest Salanova® types being one of them. They can then be asked for feedback later on. Van der Leeden: "For Rijk Zwaan and the growers, too, this has huge advantages. Such specific information provides much valuable input for our breeders." ◉

▼ On Wednesday 19 April, the official kick-off took place at Kruidenier in Rotterdam of the chain project between Rijk Zwaan, Kruidenier and growers. The majority of participating partners were present at this event.



Participating companies

Together with Rijk Zwaan, Kruidenier continues to look for varieties that mesh with the needs of its buyers. At the moment, collaborations already exist with the following Sensational Flavours growers:

- Firma Ton (sweet pointed peppers, Palermo RZ)
- Lucassen (Salanova)
- Prominent (tomatoes, Roterno RZ)
- Gebr. Duijvestijn (tomatoes, Elanto RZ)

'Growing system of the future'

Dutch grower Deliscious is a pioneer in the field of hydroponics: the company has been cultivating Salanova® and Salatrio without soil since as far back as 2006.



▲ Gutter system

"Although it involves a very high level of investment, growing in gutters offers numerous advantages," explains Mark Delissen from Deliscious. "Our staff notice a huge benefit: they can work more ergonomically, thanks to the gutters and plants being located at a convenient height. Also, since the mobile gutters enable the harvestable crops to be taken to a central harvesting point, employees no longer need to stand for hours in the humid glasshouses." However, this approach is equally important, if not more so: their method requires minimal use of crop protection agents. "We guarantee our customers a maximum of 50% of the MRL (Maximum Residue Limit), but in practice we rarely exceed 30%. Furthermore, we can grow crops much more

efficiently and in a smaller space, which generates sizeable savings in terms of energy, water and fertiliser, for example. In view of ever-stricter environmental regulations, we are firmly convinced that hydroponics represents the future. It is a very good long-term method for cultivating consistently high-quality lettuce."

Salanova® plus root ball

The Delissen brothers consciously decided to grow Salanova this way: "It makes it easier to stand out in the market, essential when using this system. However, it also presents an extra challenge, since this new growing method means a constant search for the most suitable varieties, so we have intensive contact with Rijk Zwaan's crop advisors who know exactly what we want." Rijk Zwaan's chain specialists also visit the nursery regularly. "With them and our agent, Staay Food Group, we are continually working on expanding our customer base. We currently focus mainly on the major grocery chains in the Netherlands, Germany and the UK, as they are

interested in securing year-round supplies. We aim to keep communication lines short, for retailers want to know where their products have come from. This has an extra benefit for us, too: we get valuable feedback from the market which both Deliscious and Rijk Zwaan can use to their advantage." ◉

Hydro culture has huge advantages

Although hydroponics takes on several different forms, the 'gutter' or 'gully' system and the 'floating' system have been the most common methods for many decades. Both are very sustainable cultivation systems which result in high levels of staff productivity and good yields per square metre. The lettuce can be supplied as 'living lettuce' (lettuce plus root ball) with a substantially longer shelf life.

The gully system (pictured top left) is gaining ground in Europe in par-



'Super-sustainable crop'



Spanish grower Aurelil Gomez focuses wholly on the specialities market, where his aim is to consistently achieve top-level quality. Cultivating Salanova in a floating system fits in perfectly with his objectives.



▲ Floating system

Gomez's nursery is located in the Spanish town of Cantabria which has a perfect climate. A fresh sea breeze helps to keep things cool in summer and, thanks to the mild temperatures, no heating is required in winter. Using a floating system makes his approach even more sustainable, explains Gomez. "We're

ticular. Growing begins with a high density of plants, but this is gradually reduced over time as the mobile gullies are relocated. This system is fully automated, from planting right through to harvesting.

In a floating system (pictured top right) the lettuce grows on platforms or 'rafts' which float on the surface of the water. The lettuce starts off on a raft with high-density plant growth and is subsequently replanted onto rafts with lower plant density. An added advantage of this system is that it includes a buffer against variations in water temperature and nutrient levels.

already using a growing method that needs no energy, and in fact we're expecting it to generate energy for us soon! Furthermore, because the lettuce floats on the water's surface, it requires very little effort to actually harvest the crop. It is also a very 'clean' process. There is no soil or substrate that could potentially contaminate the product, so we don't need to use pesticides. Plus, the fact that we work with a closed system means that we are very economical with water: we capture and store it on-site and never waste any, since it all gets reused."

Quality is key

Five different Salanova varieties are currently being grown in the floating system. Gomez first came across this convenience product some five years ago, on the internet of all places. "It immediately caught my attention, as it was so innovative. So many small leaves, and ready to eat with just one cut of a knife – that's something really special." It was a conscious decision to start small-scale, supplying mainly local customers at first, but now they include some na-

tional businesses, and the company is also considering exporting. "Any market that values quality is a chance for our product, although we don't want to grow too big. For now, our product still really is something special, and quality matters more to us than quantity." One of the factors helping the company achieve the desired level of quality is its fully temperature-controlled chain after harvesting. The product is packed with its roots still in water. "This 'living lettuce' has an exceptional shelf life and because Salanova is so attractive, some people even display it until they are ready to eat it!" ☉



Spinach in all types and sizes the world over



▲ Larry Santos of Lone Oak

Babyleaf:
‘Disease resistances are essential’

In the USA, babyleaf is by far the most important type of spinach and is often used in fresh salads. Grower Larry Santos of organic growing company Lone Oak Farms based in Salinas Valley (California), talks about this type’s key characteristics: “While the yield per hectare is very important, so too are the shelf life and leaf structure, which is why we prefer the Silverwhale RZ and Pigeon RZ varieties. In addition to both being high-quality varieties with a good yield, they also demonstrate strong resistance to diseases which, for us as an organic company, is absolutely essential! Another important characteristic is the seed quality: this needs to be good to ensure that we can harvest a uniform product after the babyleaf’s short growing period of approximately 30 days.” ☉



Frozen foods:
‘Consistent quality very important’



▲ Steve De Backere of D'Arta

In European countries such as Germany, France and the UK, spinach is a popular frozen product. D'Arta, a family-owned Belgian company, is one of the frozen-food sector’s major players. Steve De Backere, in charge of the company’s agri-business, explains: “Our customers can be divided into three groups: professional catering, retail and food processing. Since we sell under our own brand – Greens, which covers a range of different vegetables – it is very important to maintain a consistent level of quality, and especially so in the case of such a delicate product as spinach. Our spinach is currently being grown by 60 different growers, who are growing Rijk Zwaan varieties including Beaver RZ and Sparrow RZ. These varieties have the right resistance levels, a dark green leaf colour and a good leaf:stem ratio.” ☉



▲ Wim in 't Groen, crop co-ordinator Rijk Zwaan

Savoy:
‘Good shelf life thanks to large leaves’

Savoy spinach is an interesting niche market in the Netherlands. Few can match Crop Coordinator Wim in 't Groen’s knowledge of this type. “Due to the crinkliness of the leaves, this type of spinach is mainly used in stir-fry recipes. Since the leaf is particularly thick and textured, there’s still enough leaf left to eat even after cooking. Another key feature is the nice dark green colour of its leaves. Its unique characteristics make savoy spinach very popular among our customers, including the supermarkets. The larger leaves ensure a better shelf life, which is a big plus point compared to traditionally packed spinach.” ☉



Red vein:
'An ideal niche
product'



▲ Graham Clarkson of Vitacress

Spinach with red veins is a real speciality, and its growers include European company Vitacress, which sells the product in the UK, Portugal and Spain. For Graham Clarkson of Vitacress, red-vein spinach is the perfect niche product. "It enables us to really differentiate ourselves in the market. With Red Cardinal RZ, we have a variety with exactly the right growing characteristics – it grows steadily and we are able to maintain a consistently high quality, which is the basis for successful sales results. Furthermore, it is slow-bolting, and the contrast between the colours of its leaves and veins is particularly attractive. Hence it is a good addition to our expanding portfolio of baby leaves and mixed salads." ☉



▲ Yoshio Yunoki of Takada Seeds

Oriental type:
'Efficient harvesting
and high yield'

The standard type of spinach found in Japan and other Asian countries is the oriental type. Yoshio Yunoki, Product Development Manager at Takada Seeds, knows exactly which criteria the product needs to fulfil. "Because spinach is such a high-profile product in Japan, it has to meet particularly high standards, both in terms of its appearance and its growing characteristics. The leaves are preferably dark green and pointed, stand upright and have sturdy yet flexible stalks. This results in better efficiency during harvesting and hence a high yield. But the resistance to diseases is just as important, which is one of the strengths of the Rijk Zwaan varieties. That's why newcomer 51-139 RZ is looking very promising for the autumn/winter segment." ☉



Bunches:
'Leaves and leaf stems
not too fragile'



▲ Wybe van der Schaar, breeding manager Rijk Zwaan

In Turkey, spinach is sold in bunches. Wybe van der Schaar is Breeding Manager in Turkey, and part of his role involves testing new spinach varieties. "To be suitable for bunches, the spinach variety needs to have certain specific characteristics. It's important that the leaves and stalks are not too brittle, for example, as they would break too easily, and shelf life is another key feature. Meanwhile, for growers, general traits such as yield and growth rate are of course essential and sometimes there may be regional influences, too. For example, the oval/round types tend to be grown in the western region of Turkey, while the oriental types are found in the eastern part of the country." ☉



'Making better use of available agricultural land'

Whereas some western countries are already optimising the yield from agricultural land, and many others are in the process of doing so, as little as 20 per cent of potential farmland in Africa is currently being utilised. And here, according to agricultural expert Rudy Rabbinge, lies the key to solving the world's food problem. "Farmers need to have access to the right knowledge and means."



▲ Prof. Dr. Ir. Rudy Rabbinge

Prof. Dr. Ir. Rudy Rabbinge is professor of sustainable development and food safety at Wageningen University and was a member of the upper house of the Dutch parliament from 1999 to 2007. With extensive national and international experience and having published more than 200 scientific articles, he is regarded as a thought-leader in the field of agriculture and development cooperation.

The role of vegetables in solving the problem should most definitely not be underestimated, stresses Rabbinge. "Currently, there is often too much emphasis on high-calorie foods, such as soybeans and food grains. These result in such an unbalanced diet that cases of obesity are even starting to emerge in third-world countries!" To further underline the importance of vegetables, Rabbinge highlights the example of vitamin A, which is necessary to prevent blindness. "Nowadays, you tend to see companies trying to increase the vitamin A content in rice, while it would actually be better for consumers to combine eating regular rice with enough vegetables which naturally contain high levels of vitamin A. There's still a lot to be done in terms of educating consumers in this way."

Varieties for Africa

Rijk Zwaan is contributing to solving the world's food problem in its own way:

through agricultural schools in Peru and Guatemala, which ensure that local communities receive access to knowledge about growing vegetables, and through the breeding work done by its African subsidiary, RZ Afrisem (see page 10). "I support that initiative wholeheartedly," says Rabbinge. "In particular because it is wholly in line with Rijk Zwaan's core business. The fact that the company has a vested interest in its long-term success enables a genuine and sustainable integration of the activities into the organisation." Vegetable breeding companies have a crucial role to play in solving the world's food problem, maintains Rabbinge. "But the availability of nutrients and water for the crops is equally important, as is the control of diseases and pests. Providing enough energy is spent on all of these aspects, I am convinced that there is already enough agricultural land available to feed the entire world." ☉

Responsibility

Rijk Zwaan's wealth of knowledge enables the company to extract maximum taste, convenience and health from all that nature has to offer. While this opens up commercial opportunities, both for Rijk Zwaan and its industry partners, it also places considerable responsibility on the company's shoulders – and Rijk Zwaan takes this responsibility very seriously. The company strives to use its vegetable expertise in a sustainable and socially responsible way, both in the course of its day-to-day business and through special projects. To this end, Rijk Zwaan

'Healthy choices should be easy choices'

In addition to regular exercise, a healthy diet is essential when it comes to tackling obesity. Paul Rosenmöller, chairman of the *Convenant Gezond Gewicht* ('Healthy Weight Covenant'), believes that vegetables have a key role to play in this approach, in particular in view of their high vitamin, mineral and fibre content.



▲ Paul Rosenmöller

In the Netherlands, Paul Rosenmöller is known primarily as a former member of the *GroenLinks* political party: he was party leader in the lower house of the Dutch parliament from 1994 to 2002. Since 2005, he has been chairman of the *Convenant Gezond Gewicht* ('Healthy Weight Covenant'), which is a collaboration between numerous government bodies, companies from the commercial sector and welfare organisations which have joined forces in an attempt to reverse the current upward trend of obesity among both children and adults.



regularly turns to experts – on sustainable farming, for example, or healthy eating – for advice. Read what two of them have to say on these pages.

"Many people are already aware of the importance of eating two ounces of vegetables and two pieces of fruit per day," says Rosenmöller. "But if we are to really boost levels of vegetable consumption, it has to become the focus of society as a whole. The healthy choice needs to become the easy choice – priced attractively, and promoted accordingly in supermarkets, for example." Rosenmöller also believes that the commercial sector can play its part too, with each company operating based on its own expertise: "Speaking now as a consumer, I regularly notice huge variations in the taste and quality of vegetables. While breeding work is not part of my particular field, I am sure that a good, consistent taste can help to make vegetables even more appealing."

Educating schoolchildren

Children in particular often seem to be under the impression that vegetables 'don't taste nice', which explains the de-

cision to identify young people as a specific target group within the *Convenant Gezond Gewicht*. Rosenmöller: "Naturally, parents also have an important role to play, but I am a strong advocate of public-private partnerships. For example, handing out free fruit and vegetables in schools is a terrific initiative in my opinion, and companies can also help in educating youngsters. After all, it is essential that children know where vegetables come from – that they are products of nature, and often associated with a particular season." For its part, *Rijk Zwaan* regularly plays host to visiting primary-school classes, and recently launched a web-based community (lovemysalad.com) and a children's website about vegetables. Rosenmöller is convinced that these kinds of initiatives can contribute to a greater awareness of the importance of vegetables. "And if we can then turn those thoughts into deeds, we will eventually achieve our goal." ☉

'Active in Africa for Africa'



The most unique of all of Rijk Zwaan's subsidiaries, RZ Afrisem in Tanzania, has been developing varieties specifically for the African market since 2008. In doing so, Rijk Zwaan aims to elevate the African horticultural sector to new heights.



▲ With RZ Afrisem, Rijk Zwaan wants to help in making better use of the enormous potential of the African continent.

Together with the East West Seeds company, which has extensive vegetable-breeding experience in tropical regions of Asia, Rijk Zwaan has been active in the African horticultural sector for several years. It took its first exploratory steps in the Tanzanian Vegetable Seed Program (TVSP) from 2005 to 2007. Existing vegetable varieties were tested for suitability for Africa, and local farmers received initial training on a small scale. This initiative evolved and resulted in RZ Afrisem being founded in 2008, with the primary aim to provide the local African horticultural sector with as many 'hybrid' varieties as possible in the long term. Hybrid varieties are much more productive than traditionally 'pure' varieties. Not only does this mean a greater availability of food for the local population, but farmers' chances of generating a good income are also increased.

Growing vegetables sustainably

Like all Rijk Zwaan's subsidiaries, RZ Afrisem is located at the heart of the target market. This enables the deve-

lopment of varieties which are perfectly tailored to local needs, both in terms of the climatic conditions and market requirements. In Africa, in addition to factors such as production and shelf life, resistances to diseases and pests are especially important. After all, resistances mean that fewer pesticides are used, which not only saves money but also enables crops to be grown sustainably and the available farmland to be utilised more effectively. Another essential aspect is access to advice on growing the crops, since the African farmers have no previous experience in growing hybrid varieties and require professional support. That is why RZ Afrisem is organising increasing numbers of trial demonstrations, to help growers achieve the maximum yield from a particular variety.

Long road ahead

First and foremost, RZ Afrisem's breeding programme focuses on developing African tomatoes, aubergines and peppers. Varieties from Rijk Zwaan's regular range are also being evaluated

on their suitability for growing in eastern Africa. Now, in its third year of operating, RZ Afrisem employs around 50 people, including a breeding manager, 4 Tanzanian assistant breeders and a product development manager. The first aubergine hybrids will be introduced soon. Yet Rijk Zwaan realises that the road ahead is long, and that this type of project does not contribute to the company's profits in the short term. However, there is no doubt that the only way to maximise the African continent's enormous potential is to equip the local population with the right knowledge and means. By sharing its own expertise, Rijk Zwaan is happy to be making a significant contribution to this process. ☉



Trial Center Tomato helps entire chain in choosing varieties

In recent years the Rijk Zwaan tomato demo in Steenbergen has developed into an indispensable phenomenon within the tomato world. With the start of a brand new demo nursery in Kwintsheul, Rijk Zwaan is now setting an even higher standard.




The Trial Center Tomato, as the demo nursery is officially called from now on, is 1 ha in size and is run by experienced tomato grower Leo van Meurs (see box). A total of 100 paths are available; plenty of room, therefore, for trialling the wide tomato range of Rijk Zwaan and comparing all varieties with each other in exactly the same conditions. With a crop height of 6 metres, the same as in most new glasshouses, and equipped with a modern gutter system the glasshouse not only totally meets today's demands but is also ideal for trialling varieties in a practical situation for years to come.

Same principle

Because the nursery was built specifically for this purpose, all facilities are optimally equipped for it. There is, for instance, a separate reception area, away from the processing area. Although the new location does mean an improvement as regards details, the principle of the tomato demo will not change at all. As before, comprehensive records will be kept of all varie-

ties. Apart from all crop-technical data, the Brix value of all varieties will be measured as well and there will be regular shelf-life tests. And, naturally, all varieties can be tasted throughout the year. In short, a visit to the Trial Center Tomato is definitely worthwhile for each link in the chain – from grower to supermarket or processor.

Wide range

During the first year of the Trial Center Tomato no fewer than 71 varieties will be on show. Not only main varieties Arvento RZ (loose) and Cappricia RZ (truss) can be seen, tasted and assessed there, but also, for instance, large truss tomato Endeavour RZ, promising small beef tomato Tomala RZ and ultra-flavourful Santa type Confetto RZ. Interested in a visit? Then contact your own Rijk Zwaan contact person or send an e-mail to chainmanagement@rijkszwaan.nl 

Another experienced tomato grower

As the new demo manager, Leo van Meurs takes over the baton from Harry Augustijn, who managed the demo in Steenbergen for the previous 7 years. According to Rijk Zwaan Crop Co-ordinator Tomatoes Ben Zwinkels, Leo is the ideal new demo manager for Rijk Zwaan. "Just like Harry, Leo is a highly experienced tomato grower for whom running the tomato demo is a great new challenge. We are convinced, therefore, that this will be an excellent collaboration."



▲ Crop co-ordinator Ben Zwinkels (left) and demo manager Leo van Meurs.

Green batavia successful as part of McDonald's menu



Vegetable processor Country Foods supplies processed lettuce to 121 outlets of McDonald's Singapore. The two companies work in close collaboration in their ongoing search for 'the perfect leaf' that will represent benefits for the entire chain. Their latest success is green batavia lettuce, a type that has been proven to work very well in the 'Salad Chicken McGrill'.



▲ Lettuce is gaining quite some ground in Asia.

Known for regularly adding new products to its menu, McDonald's involves Country Foods very closely in its product development process. "It's not easy to find a lettuce leaf that meets all the requirements," explains Angela Fong, senior manager Technical Development, Country Foods. "In addition to the lettuce tasting great, its colour and shelf life are also hugely important. Ideally, we should be able to prepare the harvested product as efficiently as possible in our processing plant."

Lettuce is gaining ground

The burger chain introduced its Salad Chicken McGrill, featuring the lettuce supplied by Country Foods, in December last year. Batavia and lollo bionda were both used for the launch and it appears that batavia has a better shelf life after processing, making it the preferred choice. Fong: "Batavia is characterised by a better taste and shelf life, as well as having a good bite. On top of that, its nice curly edges are very appealing from a presentation point of view."

Thanks to these characteristics, batavia lettuce appears to have secured its place in the McDonald's product range. "This also marks an important development for the Asian lettuce market in general. This healthy product has slowly but surely become part of regular eating habits in Singapore, and we firmly believe that lettuce will soon be gaining significant ground in other Asian countries too!"

In order to guarantee a constantly high level of quality, Country Foods works closely with a select group of growers, explains Fong. "Especially in the case of a new product launch, it is crucial that we deliver the highest quality product supported by a sustainability programme. We work on identifying the optimum harvest moment and the right growing techniques, in order to achieve the best possible product characteristics. There are more than 30 food safety and quality checks in place just to deliver batavia to our customer." Needless to say, the choice of variety also plays an important role. In this case, Rijk Zwaan's

Tokapie RZ variety was selected for the batavia type, because of its relatively small leaves. "We only started working with Rijk Zwaan recently, but we are already reaping the benefits. We are only too pleased to receive their expertise and growing advice, and they have also helped us find more growers who meet our quality criteria!" ☉



Country Foods Pte Ltd is wholly-owned by the SATS Group. Based in Singapore, its plant is fitted with the latest vegetable-processing equipment. Country Foods leads the market there for "bespoke food experiences" in chilled and frozen meals, freshly processed fruits and vegetable salads and institutional and events catering. Its customers include airlines, international fast-food chains and convenience stores.

Salanova® breaks through in Japan



When it's a matter of eating and drinking, Japanese consumers are always open to something new. So there is every chance, therefore, of a successful introduction of convenience lettuce Salanova®. Rijk Zwaan and distributor Takada Seeds believed in it and together with a number of partners started a chain project.



▲ Mr. Miyazaki of the Agri Green nursery where Salanova is grown in a modern gutter system.

Although most of the lettuce consumption in Japan concerns iceberg lettuce, there is also a market for specialities, as Product Development Manager Yoshiro Yunoki of Takada Seeds knows: "The challenge for us, four years ago, was to make Salanova one of those specialities. We started working together intensively with a number of regular partners who are totally behind the product: experienced growers as well as ambitious sales organisations, so that, with the Rijk Zwaan varieties, a good triangle would be created."

Wide spread

One of those parties involved is Sinjuku Vegeful, a wholesale company that sells its products predominantly to a large number of local supermarkets. "We have initiated this company totally in the world of Salanova," Yunoki relates. "Not only by providing them with the necessary promotional material but especially by telling them the Salanova story. After all, it is essential with Salanova that consumers become convinced

of the added value!" Using the same reasoning, a collaboration with Maruyasu was entered into, a trading company that supplies especially restaurants in and around Tokyo with Salanova. "By offering the product to many parties we want to introduce as many people as possible to the unique traits of Salanova."

Together with Sinjuku and Maruyasu, Takada Seeds and Rijk Zwaan also went in search of a number of progressive growers, who can grow high-quality

Salanova. One of those nurseries is Agri Green, which has a modern gutter system – ideal for growing clean and high-quality Salanova. "One of the challenges that faced us here was the climate, as Japanese summers can be extremely hot and humid," Yunoki relates. "In the end we appeared to have got hold of the right varieties with oakleaf types Dagama RZ in summer and Cook RZ for the rest of the year. The product is packed by Agri Green in a specially developed pyramid-shaped pack and sold as whole heads with root ball attached."



Further growth

In the meantime, Yunoki does not hesitate in calling the launch of Salanova in Japan a success. "Consumers think it's a very attractive product and are willing to pay a premium for it. Restaurants praise the convenience as well, plus the very small amount of waste it gives. No wonder, then, that we expect quite a lot of growth for this product in the years ahead!" ☉

Reacting worldwide to consumers

Alessandro Silvestrelli
Sales manager,
Italy

‘Easy to prepare’



In many countries the product is totally unknown, but in Italy people love them: round aubergines. “Aubergines are a major product in Italy anyway,” says crop specialist Alessandro Silvestrelli. “We have many different types here, but the ‘Violetta type’ is really traditional in Mediterranean cooking. With its contrasting white shadow under the calyx it has a very characteristic look. At Rijk Zwaan we introduced Sabelle RZ last year, a variety that stands out with its tasty fruit flesh and has a very firm texture. Also typical is the fact that the white fruit flesh discolours only very slowly. This makes Sabelle RZ especially suitable for, say, grilling, but for consumers with less time, Sabelle can be cooked in the oven just as easily. From a crop-technical point of view, too, the

variety has huge advantages. It can be grown in glasshouses or as a field crop and in different areas and seasons. That makes it a true all-rounder!” ☉



Sabelle RZ

The Piel-de-Sapo melon type is very popular in Spain but fairly unknown outside its borders. A new variety from Rijk Zwaan that reacts to the specific wishes of the north-European market is set to change this. “In many countries the preference is for small melons, but within the Piel-de-Sapo type there were never any specific varieties to meet that

preference – until now, that is. Present supplies in northern Europe consist of the smaller fruits of a standard Piel-de-Sapo variety, whose taste and quality are clearly of a lower standard. Ricura RZ is the first variety bred specifically for new Piel-de-Sapo markets, like the UK and Germany. This is the first variety to combine a small fruit size with the true, outstanding Piel-de-Sapo taste. Because of its unique traits we have started a quality label for it: Mellissimo. Only varieties that meet our high quality demands will be grown for this label. With year-round supplies of Piel-de-Sapo melons of a consistent quality I am convinced that we will be able to increase the total consumption of this type quite considerably,” Chain Manager Alberto Cuadrado explains. ☉

Alberto Cuadrado
Chain manager, Spain

‘Expanding the Piel-de-Sapo market’



Ricura RZ

Diego Maestre
Melon co-ordinator,
Spain

'Label for top segment'



Together with a number of chain partners, Rijk Zwaan recently launched a new label for Piel-de-Sapo melons. Especially for the top segment in the Spanish market the company introduces 'Melon de Autor'. "At Rijk Zwaan we are convinced that varieties with an exceptional taste deserve special attention," says melon co-ordinator Diego Maestre. "At the moment, however, there is a mishmash of different melon types and brands, which only confuses consumers. That is why we have now started a label for only those varieties that really distinguish themselves. That way, consumers know exactly what to look out for if they want a guarantee for quality and taste. And what's more, consistency, because that is at least as important. Although the label is aimed

at absolutely top quality, we do want to make the product widely available. That's why we are setting our sights on year-round supplies and look for the varieties that will give us just that. We will add new varieties very quickly but we use stringent quality standards: the bar is set high!" ☉



Mabel RZ

In central Asia, among others, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan, people are crazy about a special type of mini cucumber. With a length of 8 – 10 cm it resembles a cocktail cucumber, but the diameter is slightly larger. "Because this

type is so popular here, we have put a lot of energy in developing good varieties in recent years," says Rijk Zwaan breeder Hasan Yoldas. "The first result is Baby-star RZ which is already being grown very successfully at the moment as a field crop in the summer. Compared with the current varieties it gives a much higher production and stands out because of its good shelf life and crunchy bite. In addition to this we are now introducing a variety for winter, especially suitable as a covered crop: Espadana RZ. With these two varieties it is possible to produce a quality product year-round. But there are still plenty of challenges. Iran, for instance, is looking for a slightly darker variant which we are now trying to develop." ☉

Hasan Yoldas,
Breeder,
Central Asia

'Taste and shelf life'



Babystar RZ



Graham Clarkson,
Vitacress Salads:

“For Vitacress Salads,
as a grower and packer,
working with
Rijk Zwaan’s team
enables us to go a step
further back to the
inception of varieties
and uses across our crop
range to maximise the
value to our customers.”

If you have any questions please contact your local
Rijk Zwaan advisor or send an e-mail to
chainmail@rijkszwaan.nl