



Moving sustainable carrot production forward *and* fostering acceptance *through* stakeholder dialogue



Food Safety

Holistic approach involving chemical and biological crop protection

Marketability

Informing consumers about where and how their carrots are grown

Sustainability

Stakeholder engagement for sustainable carrot production

food chain partnership



What was *the market situation?*

Carrots are a very important outdoor crop in Western Europe, and not just in Belgium. At the same time, the market for fresh produce in Europe is increasingly being driven by stricter societal demands – not least because consumers want to know where and how their food is produced.

Group Verduyn, a third-generation family-owned company with operations in various European countries (e.g. Belgium, The Netherlands, France and Spain), serves the fresh market, food service sector and frozen food industry in 18 countries with fresh vegetables such as cabbages, leeks, peas, and carrots, Group Verduyn's specialty. The Group also has its own farmers' association, Green Farm, and is one of Europe's largest carrot specialists. The Group's services range from planting the seed to delivering a finished product.

Food has become an emotional issue in many European countries. Besides taste and quality, sustainable production is now a key requirement. In supplying both the fresh and frozen vegetable market, Group Verduyn is confronted by a simple-sounding question: "What is sustainable for customers?" The answer is anything but straightforward. And as a Group spokesman says, "This is a challenging puzzle that we cannot solve alone." That is why a Food Chain Partnership was initiated with Bayer in 2018.



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What were *the challenges?*

Vegetable farmers in Europe face numerous challenges. The weather, stricter regulations governing the number of crop protection products available, and the emotional debate about food are giving farmers a hard time in meeting ever-increasing consumer expectations on the limited land available. One of the key challenges involves creating trustful acceptance for the vegetable production process

along the entire food value chain. Group Verduyn and Bayer took up this challenge through an approach that enables the Group's farmers to grow high-quality carrots in a sustainable but economically acceptable way. Growing carrots sustainably has proven to be a step-by-step learning process.

What was *the solution?*

Installing a Food Chain Partnership created the right space for open dialogue, transparency and the exchange of knowledge on sustainable carrot production. The expertise that Group Verduyn and Green Farm had gained over many years has been combined with Bayer's seed, innovation and crop protection solutions to create added value from field to fork. In response to the challenging market environment, all the partners have committed themselves

to a holistic approach involving complementary crop solutions. These include new carrot varieties as well as both chemical and biological crop protection products that are being safely applied by farmers using new and optimized application technologies to further minimize the impact on the environment. In this way, farmers are coping better with the limited farmland available in a country like Belgium.

"Food chain partnership creates space for open dialogue on what is sustainability and fosters acceptance for a holistic approach, wherein Bayer's innovations are part of the solution."

Veerle Mommaerts, Food Chain Manager, Bayer Crop Science Belgium

Carl Claerhout, agronomic advisor for more than 21 years at Green Farm:
"I am in the fields daily and have been seeing situations where more weeds than carrots are present. The only way forward is to use new technologies and innovation to optimize our farming practices. I am convinced that we will achieve our goal – growing carrots sustainably – when we look at the growing process in a holistic way. I am happy that we can do this together with Bayer's experts."





What did *we achieve?*

This Food Chain Partnership focuses on two pillars: growing carrots sustainably and engaging stakeholders. In view of the challenges described above, Group Verduyn and Bayer redefined the sustainable carrot production goals as follows: high carrot quality, residue optimization (i. e., ultra-low residue levels) and genuine sustainability. The outcome was a tailored solution involving, among other things, fewer chemical-based active ingredients, biological crop protection products, fertilizer inputs adjusted to the needs of the plant, and the selection of specific varieties. Over the past two years, tests have been running at various farms to broaden knowledge levels and monitor the impact on yield, quality and shelf life. The successful implementation of the project results will be determined by their profitability for farmers and their affordability for consumers. Stakeholder engagement has included visits to key food chain value partners to stimulate open dialogue, share the sustainability vision, and create trust, credibility and acceptance for the holistic approach.



Challenges:

- Producing sustainable high-quality carrots when stricter regulations are narrowing down the European farmers' toolbox
- Creating acceptance by the food value chain for a sustainable production process



Solutions:

- Holistic approach to control pest, disease and weed pressures
- Dialogue with key food value chain players to foster acceptance



Benefits:

- Opportunities to respond to agricultural challenges and evolutionary developments in the food chain thanks to Bayer solutions as an integral part of a sustainable holistic approach
- Support for Group Verduyn's sustainability vision from key food value chain partners

“How will the art of growing vegetables look like in the future? Innovation is the driver of sustainability, so I am sure that Bayer’s crop solutions will play an important role for us to achieve our goal. Today we already see the added value of partnering with Bayer’s experts.”

Alexander Verduyn, CEO, Group Verduyn

“We need solutions to keep growing high quality carrots!”

Willy Vandenbrande,
President, Green Farm



About Food Chain Partnership

Consumers are becoming increasingly conscious of the need for healthy nutrition. Food Chain Partnerships help to supply consumers with high-quality fresh produce, which forms the basis of a healthy diet. But such partnerships can only succeed if they involve every player in the food chain – from the farmer and processor to the exporter or importer and retailer. The Crop Science Division of Bayer has the global experience and cutting-edge expertise to create a successful partnership at every level.



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