

Valuable Vegetables

# Webinar series 2020 - 1

*3 September 2020*

## Food safety on your plate

**Lessons learned and innovative solutions for improving food safety of fresh vegetables and fruits for both export and domestic markets.**

Food safety in the vegetables and fruit sector is a joint responsibility of both the public and private sector, of producers, traders, processors, retailers and consumers. Collaboration is required to address systemic obstacles to food safety, particularly the promotion of good agricultural practices, the access to and affordability of safe vegetables and fruit, as well as the need for more awareness of the importance of food safety. These were among the key highlights of a practice-based webinar in the context of the Valuable Vegetables initiative.

### **Safety as a complex system challenge**

Food safety is vital to the achievement of food and nutrition security and economic progress in any country. Unfortunately, large volumes of vegetables and fruits do not meet the quality and safety standards which most export markets and domestic consumers demand. Boosting safety in the horticulture sector is a complex, systemic challenge, which requires bold action by producers, traders, processors, storage units, retailers and consumers. No actor can do this on their own, and all need to put an effort to make sure the whole system works towards safe food for all. The private and the public sector need to collaborate, and the education sector and research partners can contribute to innovative solutions too.

Food safety measures are part and parcel of good agricultural practices at the horticulture production level. Producers need to have the knowledge and skills to apply safety measures in vegetables and fruits production. They need to be aware of the risks of toxic products and pathogens, and be critical regarding the quality and safety of inputs used. Guidance and support to horticultural producers is provided through different service providers and institutions, and these services have shown to be

important for the producers to build and strengthen their capacities to achieve the appropriate standards. In addition, food safety measures are applied in other parts of the value chain, for example using a controlled logistics system; using traceability software; training stakeholders; and applying innovative pricing systems.

Challenges relate to the cost of compliance to safety standards, and the impact thereof on farmers' incomes and consumer market prices. A higher price for a safe product is common practice in most countries in Africa, though this reality is not in accordance with the right of all consumers to safe food. Another challenge is to have the right traceability systems in place; these are key to implement safety standards across the value chain. In addition, there is a need to create awareness about the importance of food safety among different stakeholder groups. Finally, there are institutional challenges. Several countries have seen the creation of multi-stakeholder platforms during multi-annual horticulture programmes, which can play an effective and relevant role in addressing food safety across the system. But these platforms themselves are not always (financially) sustainable beyond the programme lifecycle.

## Experiences from Kenya and Ghana

### Meeting the consumers' demand for safe food

*Ms. Sylvia Kuria, Director of Sylvia's Basket Ltd, Kenya*

Sylvia Kuria runs a small organic shop in Nairobi, Sylvia's Basket, which sources from 20 organic farmers and supplies organic food to more than eighty homes per week. She is working mainly with female farmers and also supports youth in urban areas to start kitchen gardens. The producers form a network, which set up two demonstration plots and trained over 1,000 other farmers on basic organic agriculture principles. The food sold to clients is safe, as it is grown organically without using chemical fertilizers. Ms. Kuria collaborates with a logistics partner (Wells Cargo), which helps to transport the produce to clients in good condition. Most of their clients prefer to purchase online and food is delivered at their doorsteps.



From experience, Ms. Kuria observes a growing consumer awareness on the negative effects of synthetic pesticides, herbicides and Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs), which explains their

increasing demand for safe food. Farmers are willing to learn how to grow safe food, for example using net house technology which helps growing high value crops organically with very little or no damage. She also sees challenges: most farmers do not have access to information, markets and a constant supply of water to produce safe food. Consumers are not aware of the risks of consuming food from sources that are not verifiable. And financial resources lack to provide technical assistance to small scale farmers. Still, Sylvia's Basket is optimistic that in the near future they will be able to expand its client base and to buy organic farm produce from 200 farmers. [Read her presentation](#)

## Food safety measures during processing and transport

*Mr. Alex Muli, Director and Co-founder of Goshen Farm Exporters Ltd, Kenya*

The business model of Goshen Farm Exporters Ltd is based on value addition to products provided by over 4,000 smallholder farmers, amongst others through drying and packaging of fresh fruit, for both domestic and export markets. The facility in Makueni has a processing capacity of 10 t/day as well as cold chain facilities. The food safety measures include contract farming combined with traceability software, farmer capacity building training, a controlled logistic chain and farmers' certification on a cost share basis. The company leverages technology via market information systems (MIS) and radio, collaborating with amongst others the Food Retailers Association.



Among the lessons Mr Muli learnt in practice with his business is that getting an audit by a certification body is costly, and that legislation is key. A challenge he observed is that many consumers are not really aware of the importance of food safety: many of them just assume 'it looks good, so it will be safe'. Another complication is that international investors from the US or the EU for example, tend to concentrate on food safety measures for products destined for export markets, more than on those for the domestic markets. [Read his presentation](#)

## Ghana Green Label

*Ms. Sheila Assibey-Yeboah, Project Manager HortiFresh programme, Ghana*

Food safety is among the key challenges of the Ghanaian horticulture sector, explains Ms. Sheila Assibey-Yeboah, project manager of the multi-stakeholder HortiFresh programme in Ghana. The country was confronted with a ban on the export of several plant commodities to the European Union

from 2015-2018, which was among reasons to start Ghana Green Label, as part of the HortiFresh<sup>1</sup> programme in Ghana. This programme, supported by the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Ghana, aims to build a sustainable and internationally competitive Fruit & Vegetable Sector, that contributes to inclusive economic growth, food and nutrition security. It uses a range of instruments for engaging the sector, including several food safety related efforts:

- Food Safety Taskforce, a collaboration between public and private partners streamlining food safety monitoring and enforcement.
- Active engagement on food safety matters with the Food and Drugs Authority and the EPA.
- EU Exports Taskforce, which liaises with stakeholders for requisite standards to be adhered to along the export chain.
- Integrating a comprehensive certification scheme within the fruits and vegetables landscape

Ms. Assibey-Yeboah states that in the course of the programme, partners learnt that a well-functioning food safety system needs both public and private investment. In Ghana this is not (yet) the case. Rolling out food safety standards to cover fruits and vegetables for all segments of consumers remains a challenge. Consumer awareness about food safety is important, as this encourages them to ask for the products with a label. This on its turn may imply the risk that the demand would be higher than the current supply. Hence, there is a need to ensure that there is proper training for farmers to meet the standards, and a suitable tracking and tracing system for the horticulture sector with its many smallholder growers and the diversity of crops. Valuable lessons were also learnt about multi-stakeholder collaboration and institutional sustainability. Mandates and responsibilities of public and private partners could have been clearer, while a solution is still being sought for the challenge of how the task force is going to be sustained for the long run. The Embassy of the Netherlands in Accra is currently reflecting on this.



[Read her presentation](#)

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<sup>1</sup> The HortiFresh Programme in Ghana was among the cases presented in the publication commissioned in the context of the Valuable Vegetables initiative: “Key findings and lessons from Dutch publicly funded horticulture initiatives in LMICs. [Valuable Vegetables Synthesis Paper.](#)”

# Market dynamics and food safety

Online breakout group discussions further explored the role of consumers. Participants observed that many consumers are aware about safe food, but that the higher price for safe products is often an obstacle: "Food safety for now is a luxury. BoP consumers are caring for a meal, that's their first concern." Raising further consumer awareness is an activity that should cut across all stakeholders. "Sylvia's case is an example that at the consumer level, affordability and safety are possible and scaling is the next step."

Participants also reflected on the role of processors and transporters, and agreed that the food safety awareness and action of these stakeholders needs to be higher on the agenda. It would be good to clarify what role intermediary players can play. The power of 'market queens' may hinder improvement of safety in some markets. In such cases creative solutions are needed, such as seeking some separate market channels for part of the value chain. The role of research and educational institutions could be to help training farmers and students, and to pilot solutions, for example processing methods with good safety standards.

Cost issues were among the key challenges discussed in all breakout groups. Applying quality and safety standards may raise the cost of production in the short term; but in the longer term this may be different, when externalities are incorporated in the product price. Some remarks were made about the relative importance of food safety as compared to food security in general: "Nobody cares about that, because it is a priority to feed the nation first. For example the domestic market for fresh produce is less important." Still, participants realised food safety is also of interest to the farmers, since food safety could improve their link to the market, and farm prices are predetermined by market dynamics.

## Next steps

The lessons exchanged in the Valuable Vegetables webinars, [synthesis paper](#) and stakeholder meetings serve as a resource to develop, implement and scale innovative solutions for urgent challenges in the horticulture sector. The Netherlands Food Partnership will build on the earlier work that was facilitated by AgriProFocus and Food & Business Knowledge Platform. It will explore the opportunities for joint impact initiatives by coalitions of stakeholders in the horticulture sector network.

### Other interesting initiatives mentioned by participants :

- **CABI BioProtection Portal.** CABI is making an effort to raise awareness of and promote the use of low risk plant protection products through a new portal free of use to all. Information on e.g. Kenya and Ghana has been uploaded, and this will be expanded to many more countries: <https://bioprotectionportal.com/>
- [www.hollandhortisupportjordan.com](http://www.hollandhortisupportjordan.com) provides support to increase the competitiveness of Jordanian SME horticulture farmers, including on quality standards.
- **Africa Improved Food, Rwanda.** Africa Improved Foods (AIF) is a public-private partnership supported by FMO, which provides a scalable and sustainable solution to malnutrition via local production of highly nutritious foods. As a buying company, it took a systemic approach to prevent aflatoxine in crops, which is explained in an informative interview available online (minute 2.50 via this [link](#))