

How to create a smaller gap between producer and consumer

The Netherlands:

We live in the Netherlands with 17 million people and a amazing big number of animals on a small piece of the earth, we export about 2/3 of our products like meat, eggs and milk. On the other hand we import about 80% of our animal feed. Near to our farms live many citizens, people how are looking for rest and space in the country side. Because of scaling our farms the number of conflicts are increasing. As long as farmers stays in touch with the people and explain them about our business and how we try to work in a sustainable way we can get a lot of credits form our neighbours. We have to show what we are doing and explaining how we manage the farm!

Last decades we created a big gap between consumer point of view and what producers are doing on their Farms. Consumers don't know what is happening in Farms anymore, in the media they only hear about what is going wrong, when there is a fire or a disease among the animals. Farmers hardly tell there positive story's on television. Consumers that have never seen a Farm start thinking that farmers are not taking good care for their animals and only want to make profit on them! On the other hand do Farmers not understand consumers anymore, they work hard on their farms and try to make sure animals have everything they need, but stopped communicate about what they are doing.

During my Nuffield scholarship I visited the following countries, for each country I summarise the eye-openers in communicating with consumers, and how the sector is organized.

Japan:

I visited Japan because of his high egg consumption (about 400 eggs a year). In Japan eggs are symbol for new life. They see eggs as healthy and nutritious. Food safety is very important in Japan. Because of their eat culture, Japanese people believe eggs are Healthy, and that they need eggs to get old in a Healthy way, They consume eggs in almost every meal. Eggs are super food number One in Japan. More and more there starts a discussion about animal welfare, but now days still food safety is more important than animal welfare. Japan is the biggest importer for chicken egg white worldwide!

Austria:

Local produced is a real theme in Austria! The Austrian flag on food packaging is standard, but also a flag of the county / province in common. Producers ask a premium for local produced and packed because of a lower CO2 footprint. The layer sector is about 85% self-sufficient, the packing stations takes care that this percentage stays. When consumption is going up than they produce more eggs in Austria. Producers in

Austria get a high price for their products and imported eggs are sold as imported eggs for less money!

Switzerland:

All the Eggs produced in Switzerland are in beautiful and luxe packaging in supermarkets. On most of the packages you can find in which region the eggs are produced. Almost all the eggs produced in a region are sold in the same region. Switzerland is 80% self-sufficient, The packaging of the imported eggs is plastic. The eggs produced in Switzerland are sold for twice that much money as the imported eggs! Consumers want to pay that premium for product from Switzerland. Beside fresh Shell eggs there is a big market for boiled and painted eggs, you can find them al trough the shops! There are salad eggs at near the vegetables and "picnic eggs" near the bread. Al these egg sales are extra and haven't influence sales on the egg shelves.

Germany:

In the south of Germany is local produced a hot item, and more important than in the rest of the country. In Germany is animal welfare a more important item then we see in the Netherlands. The logo of KAT (Kontrollierte Alternatieve Tierhaltung) is a must on the packaging in the supermarkets. More and more you see the logo "Tierschutz Geprüft", number of birds on that farms is smaller and space for living is bigger for the birds. Also there are many "Hühnermobielen" (mobile chicken houses) in Germany, weekly the farmer is changing the place of the house in a paddock. The birds have always fresh and green grass. This small chickenfarms (200-800 birds) sell their eggs in a farm shop on the farm, consumers can see how the birds live on the farm. Universities do a lot of research about chickens that have fresh grass on their meal and look for healthy claims they can give on these eggs

USA:

Farms with millions of layers are common. Egg quality and food safety is the main item in the USA. Animal welfare gets more and more important, producers are changing to cage free production. Cage free is mainly asked by companies as Mc. Donalds and by food industry! In supermarket almost all eggs are cage produced eggs. The distance between the farms and the consumers(in miles) is huge, so there is no discussion about number of birds on a Farm.

UK:

UK produced eggs are in supermarkets also sold as UK product! Most of the imported eggs in the UK are for the Food Industry. In the UK is UK origin more important than welfare, they sell still many cage-eggs in supermarkets! Market is changing in the UK, al the new poultry houses are cage free. The field tours in the UK made me conscious that, change in thinking, renew and walking new ways can make a successful new concept.

We have to distinguish and look for new concepts and markets, there are a lot of chances.

Conclusion

We need to take a few steps to reach the goal where we renew the contact and communication between consumers and farmers. After that we can explain our production methods and get them involved in the Dutch way of Poultry farming. A healthy future in Poultry farming needs acceptance and understanding about the way we keep our birds, from the consumers. For that goal we need to work on the points below. Those points are the conclusion from my Nuffield journey, where I explore the question; how to create a smaller gap between Producer and Consumer?

- We need to tell our story about our Farms! We have to tell in different ways about what, why and how we keep our birds and how we take care of them.
- We have to open our farms, as many as possible! Consumers must be able to see, what is happening in our Farms. How we work and how the birds live! They can make their own decisions in which kind of eggs (aviary, free range or organic eggs) they want to consume.
- New formats in housing Laying birds like a Systems as Chicken caravans (Hühnermobil). Those are a good idea to involve Consumers with Poultryfarming. It's a open structure housing and consumer can see the birds and their behaviour.
- We have to substantiate that Eggs are the new Superfood. Japanese already know, they consume more than an Egg a Day. Life expectation of Japanese people is highest in the World.
- Stop wasting energy to debunk stories of NGO's like "Wakkerdier". We have to start telling the honest true story from our own farms.
- We should give our products a Face. Consumers have to trust the product they bought. The products must have a high quality, and they have to see on the packaging, where and how it was produced and by which Farmer.
- Change in thinking. Think different, think out of the box. There is space in the market for new concepts in the widest point of view.
- Invest in direct communication with groceries / supermarkets. Supermarkets know their costumers, working together with them, it is easier for farmers and we can make a faster respond on changing consumer wishes.

What can Farmers do:

- Tell your story on a facebook account, make a Blog or make a internet site where you explain your way of farming. Many people are interested in the true story about their food!

- Farmshop, direct contact with consumers, speak to them and listen to their wishes. When you know the wishes of your consumers you can change production.
- Education, tell about your farm during every opportunity you get to tell about it. For example invite people and show your farm! People get a Ambassador from your farm and will tell to other people about your farm!
- In a flyer of your farm you can summarise your farm, people can read this and you will optimise the chains that your story keeps in mind of people!

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