

## UK produce buyers consider a fresh perspective

Five top supermarkets are among the key players in the fresh produce industry who will meet this month to turn the spotlight away from their developing world producers towards the action of their buyers here in the UK and explore how to improve their ethical purchasing practices.

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This approach is in contrast to the current popular discussion around corporate social responsibility which focuses on changing the practices of overseas suppliers and then auditing them to ensure they follow UK-set standards.

The meeting is a result of a new report from Traidcraft, *A Fresh Perspective: sourcing vegetables from developing countries*, which traces fresh vegetables from the field to a UK plate.

The report reveals the hidden business risks for UK companies due to the vulnerability of thousands of smallholder farmers at the base of the fresh produce supply chain – risks which even the most proactive buyers do not always uncover.

Focusing on the actual experiences of Kenyan small-scale farmers and their exporters, the report, which is to be launched on 20 June, identifies what responsible purchasing looks like from developing countries and makes recommendations to company buyers, UK government, consumers and investors.

The report identifies five key areas for action:

1. improving forecasting and planning
2. greater use of contracts and fair procedures
3. sharing of information and improving communication
4. recognising the value of smallholder farmers
5. implementing standards fairly

With an estimated 38% of the 2.4 billion worth of fresh vegetables consumed in the UK sourced from abroad, and products that can take over 60 days from planting to reaching the supermarket shelf, the fresh produce supply chain was a critical sector to analyse current procurement practices.

It is also a sector set to grow; according to the RTS Big Food Guide 2011, expenditure on fruit and vegetables will increase by 600m from 2006-2011.

Commenting on the research, Fiona Gooch of Traidcraft, said: "What we weren't expecting was the overwhelming evidence of the lack of trust of UK buyers by fresh produce exporters in Africa. This is an important issue that needs debate and resolution so that buyers and producers can both benefit."

Nigel Jenney, Chief Executive, Fresh Produce Consortium, said: "The perishable nature of fresh produce makes the supply chain one of the most challenging to manage profitably. This report should help guide companies to improve supply reliability and reduce wastage and that will be welcomed by our members."

Steve Homer, Corporate Governance Manager, Flamingo, said: "Many companies are investing a lot of resource in managing their overseas suppliers to reduce technical and reputational risk. What is exciting about this initiative is that it focuses on simple actions that can be taken right here to deliver real benefits and in some cases commercial gains for those who are most vulnerable in the supply chain."

Notes to editors:

- The report, *A fresh perspective. Consultation: sourcing vegetables from developing countries*, is being launched at a seminar on 20 June 2007 in London.
- The event will be chaired by Nigel Jenney, Chief Executive, Fresh Produce Consortium, with Steve Homer of Flamingo and Chris Brown of Asda speaking.
- It is being organised by Traidcraft - a leading social enterprise and winner of ACCA 2006 social report award - in conjunction with the Fresh Produce Consortium.
- It will bring together importers, handlers, distributors, food processing, food service caterers, wholesalers, distributors

and retailers to discuss ways in which procurement practice can affect people in developing countries.

- The report is part of a series of reports produced by the Responsible Purchasing Initiative.
- For further information about the Fresh Produce Consortium please visit [www.freshproduce.org.uk](http://www.freshproduce.org.uk)
- Flamingo is a horticultural business involved in the growing, processing, packaging, marketing and distribution of cut flowers and fresh vegetables, with significant interests in Kenya and was voted East Africa's most respected Agribusiness three straight years from 2004 through 2006.

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