



The fruits of our labours



“Our producers always consult us before spraying”

Each plot is treated individually

The shift from fruit agent to producer

The Kölla company and its Turkish grape supplier Çelikoglu are now in their second year of cooperation in a food chain partnership with Bayer CropScience. The project has proven to be so successful with food retailers and producers alike that Kölla is now planning to expand production. Fruchthandel Magazin took a trip to the Turkish grape-growing region around Alaşehir near İzmir to learn about the programme and the Turkish grape season.

This year, for the first time, Kölla leased a total of 270 hectares of land from Çelikoglu in order to predominantly grow sultana grapes exclusively for the German market under the food chain partnership. “This means that we are moving from being solely a fruit agent to becoming a producer,” said Gündüz Sadak, Managing Partner at Kölla in Munich and responsible for business with Turkey. This is the only way to guarantee that the product is treated optimally from field to customer. Each plot is bar-coded to ensure that the produce can be traced back to its origin.

“None of our producers reach for the spraying equipment or fertilisers without consulting us,” is how he explained one of the fundamental principles of the project. Instead, the agricultural engineers at Çelikoglu consult Bayer CropScience and Kölla to determine what treatment each individual plot of land needs. This applies to both crop protection products and fertilisers. “Not all soils are the same, and plants often need differing levels of nutrients,” Sadak added. This approach ensures that the grapes are always of the same quality, irrespective of the field on which they were grown. If a plot is adjacent to land worked by someone who is not producing for Çelikoglu, the fruit from the margins of the plot is not exported to Germany as its quality may have been affected by spraying agents from a neighbouring field.



Yüksel Çelik,
Çelikoglu Ltd., Turkey



Dr Mehmet Kaya from Bayer CropScience, Gündüz Sadak from Kölla and Björn Hardt from Bayer CropScience discuss the crop



Grapes are made ready for shipping



The project team from Kölla, Çelikoğlu and Bayer CropScience





A mediator between two worlds

“Table grapes are a very sensitive product, and the correct cultivation know-how is vital to keep residues of crop protection products as low as possible,” agreed Björn Hardt, Bayer CropScience’s specialist on Turkey. The chief activity in 2006 was the production of spraying plans, and in the second year of the food chain partnership attention is now turning to precise field analyses. Hardt sees himself primarily as a mediator between two worlds, balancing the requirements of food retailers and consumers in Germany with the growing environment in Turkey. “We have to accommodate both worlds in our spraying plans,” he explained to *Fruchthandel Magazin*. But this is precisely where the difficulty lies. “If the producer has a problem, he buys a crop protection product that is registered in Turkey and deals with the problem. It’s not easy to get him to understand the expectations of food retailers in Germany.”

The project encountered some initial difficulties which, according to Hardt, mainly arose from the need to change producers’ long-standing habits and ways of thinking, but is now running well in its second year. “This was only possible because a manageable group of about 50 producers was selected to take part.” Experience to date has been so positive that other Turkish exporters and producers have already approached Hardt, wanting to implement similar concepts. In 2005 Bayer CropScience tried to get a project of this type off the ground with a different Turkish exporter, and failed in the attempt. “We started with a limited pool of producers in that instance, too,” Hardt recalled, “but when demand from abroad grew, the producers reverted to their old practices and purchased grapes from outside the group. This made it impossible to distinguish between clean and contaminated fruit.”



Quality speaks for itself

Improving the image of Turkish producers

The problem is that this type of behaviour by individual producers gives Turkish produce a reputation among European consumers for being “contaminated”. “In fact, the MRLs for produce imported within Europe are considerably higher than for produce from non-EU countries such as Turkey,” Sadak explained. He did admit, however, that a lot of mistakes were made in the past which led to the poor image of Turkish produce. This is illustrated by Bayer CropScience’s first attempt to establish a food chain partnership in Turkey. “Maybe the time just wasn’t right for it,” Hardt mused. The past two years, in particular, have seen growing public and trade interest in the subject of minimising residues. He added, however, that some people are taking it too far. “The food retailers are desperately looking for answers, but the arbitrary limit of 70 per cent imposed by many supermarket chains in recent months is not the right approach.” What is needed is binding limits worked out and agreed on by scientists, politicians and the trade, and then harmonised throughout Europe.



Participants in the food chain partnership want to help revamp German consumers' image of fruit and vegetable producers in Turkey.

Their success so far shows that they are on the right track. The concept was evaluated positively by the Austrian environmental organisation Global 2000 as part of the Rewe Austria/Billa pesticide reduction programme. Kölla is now looking at implementing similar concepts with producers in Spain and Italy. "For me the producer is the most important link," Sadak emphasised, "because the only thing that is going to win the customers' confidence is the quality that he produces." And it is confidence that bears fruit, he said, quoting one of Kölla's guiding principles.

Süleyman Çelik also believes that confidence is an important component of any business relationship. "It is our company policy to work with one importer in each country to which we export," he explained to Fruchthandel Magazin. This is the only way to ensure continuous cooperation and to generate a high level of confidence. He set up the company Çelikoglu in 1990 with his brothers Mustafa and Yüksel Çelik, and they started exporting to their first market, Russia, in 1993. The company has also been producing mainly grapes, cherries and peppers since 1995. Çelikoglu has around 1,000 hectares of land under table grapes, 270 hectares of which have been leased to Kölla since the current season started. The fruit grown on the leased land will go almost entirely to Germany, while Çelikoglu will export the harvest from the remaining 700 to 800 hectares mainly to countries in eastern Europe such as Lithuania, Latvia and Ukraine, with smaller quantities going to Russia. All the producers who work with the company are EurepGap-certified.

The 2007 season: lower yields but good quality

Çelikoglu has inaugurated a new packing facility in time for the new table-grape season – the persistent hot weather has meant that the season has started up to two weeks earlier than usual. A 3,200-square-metre building houses seven packing lines which each have a capacity of around seven truckloads per day. The unusually hot weather, with temperatures in excess of 45 degrees, and the alternating fruit production mean that growers throughout Turkey are expecting to harvest up to 50 per cent fewer table grapes this season than in 2006. A lot of fruit is also affected by sunburn. "But that doesn't affect our producers so seriously," Sadak explained. This is because of the continuous drip-irrigation systems that they use and the dense leaf canopy nurtured intensively on the plantation which protects the grapes against the worst of the sun. Yet Kölla is still expecting to har-

vest between 25 and 30 per cent less than in 2006. The company expects the land leased from Çelikoglu to yield around 4,000 tons of table grapes, of which approximately 2,500 tons, or 140 truckloads, will be suitable for export. At the same time, the heat has meant that the grapes have reached Brix values of 13 – the level needed for export to Europe – one or two weeks earlier than usual almost everywhere. "A lot of grapes have a Brix value of over 17, so we can start exporting from the second week of August," Sadak explained.



Dr Mehmet Kaya, a Bayer CropScience field technician, explains the status of grape production

In addition to sultanas, which account for 90 per cent of production, Çelikoglu also exports the varieties Superior, Perlette and some Red Globe. The grapes are marketed in Germany under Kölla's own brand "Alinda". Çelikoglu exports its produce under its own brand "Nora". From 2008 the two companies will be launching a joint brand "Noralinda" which combines the two individual brands. The new label will be used to market 28+ calibre cherries and premium grapes.

Kölla's second own brand, "AgroSky", will be used from next year to market vegetables from the Antalya region. The German fruit trader is planning to expand its production activities in this segment. Working with a Turkish partner, Kölla is investing in greenhouses for peppers in this region. For Sadak this is the logical next step following the company's move into grape production. "This will enable us to follow peppers as well from the seedling stage to the supermarket shelves."



food chain partnership



Global Food Chain Team
Bayer CropScience Aktiengesellschaft
PM-MBE-Food Chain Management
Alfred-Nobel-Str. 50
40789 Monheim am Rhein
Germany

Phone: +49 (0)2173 38 5184
Fax: +49 (0)2173 38 3253
Email: foodchainpartnership@bayercropscience.com
Internet: <http://www.foodchainpartnership.bayercropscience.com>

KÖLLA Fruchtagentur GmbH
Thalkirchner Strasse 81
81371 Munich
Germany

Phone: +49 (0)89 74 72 14 0
Fax: +49 (0)89 74 72 14 40
Email: muenchen@koella.com
Internet: <http://www.koella.de>

© 2008 by Bayer CropScience