

Biologisch Goed Van Eigen Erf: Promoting & professionalising direct sales of organic food in the Netherlands

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Co-operation at national and regional level

Biologisch Goed Van Eigen Erf ('Organic goods from our own yard') was founded in 2002 with the aim to promote the direct selling of organic products. As in other parts of Europe, organic farming in the Netherlands has strongly expanded and received growing policy support. In several regions farmers' collectives emerged to stimulate direct organic marketing by establishing close, face-to-face contacts with consumers. These regional initiatives joined forces in *Van Eigen Erf* when they felt that the National Taskforce for Organic Farming was paying insufficient attention to the strengthening of short marketing channels. To promote organic short chains *Van Eigen Erf* has created a national portal for regional web-shops of organic produce and supported the professionalisation of E-commerce. It also launched a national logo for direct selling of organics through farm shops and web shops and organizes various activities to promote local organic produce.



Professionalisation of E-commerce and promotional activities

Currently *Van Eigen Erf* joins 9 regional initiatives with a total of about 70 members. The national organization has supported the creation of new regional web shops and the professionalisation of organic E-commerce. Currently a standardised and consumer friendly ICT system is introduced, which facilitates inter-regional product exchange and strengthens a common collective presentation. *Van Eigen Erf* also organizes various promotional activities, including open days on member farms and specific fairs and events to profile local organic produce. These are often organised in partnership with organic sector interest groups, food caterers, chef cooks and environmental organisations.

Strong environmental and educational performance

The impact assessment of *Van Eigen Erf* shows that it performs strongest on educational aspects, by collectively strengthening innovation capacity, and on environmental impacts by reducing transport from producer to consumer ('food miles'). Market performances vary between farms and regional groups due to differences in life-cycle stage, characteristics of (specialised or multifunctional) member farms and strategic preferences (e.g. E-commerce versus farm shops formulae). This diversity poses challenges for co-operation at national level. In the first years the national organization was supported by public funding and now gradually *Van Eigen Erf* has to depend stronger on member contributions.



Future as Interest group or commercial entity?

At present *Van Eigen Erf* is involved in an internal debate on its future strategy. Several options are considered. Some members advocate the development into an interest group with individual membership and a stronger organisation degree amongst Dutch organic producers involved in direct marketing. This could further reinforce the political influence and lobbying capacity of the *Van Eigen Erf*. Other members opt for a more commercial approach by further strengthening the successful co-operation in E-commerce, collective marketing under a quality label for local organic produce and by creating franchise concepts for professional web shops and farm shops. At present it is still uncertain which scenario will be chosen. It seems difficult to realise both trajectories at the same time. *Van Eigen Erf* therefore faces the challenge to make a clear choice about its future strategy in the coming years.

