

## Greenhouse strawberry sector on way to maturity

The greenhouse strawberry acreage has increased again. According to Statistics Netherlands figures, 350 hectares of strawberries are currently under glass, making the greenhouse strawberry the fourth product in Dutch food horticulture. The sector isn't just growing in terms of acreage, but also in the lifecycle. The sector is maturing.

In 2014, 11 companies have an acreage of 5 hectares or more, LEI figures show. In 2007, the greenhouse strawberry sector didn't have companies of this size yet. The average company size has more than doubled in those ten years: from half a hectare in 2004 to 1.3 hectares in 2014. It's not only the size of the companies that's increasing, the total greenhouse strawberry acreage also increases year upon year. According to Statistics Netherlands, there are now 350 hectares of strawberries under glass in the Netherlands: an increase of 150 hectares in 10 years' time.

### What happens after the growth?

According to marketing professionals, a product's lifecycle consists of four stages: introduction, growth, maturity and decline. Looking at the greenhouse strawberries, it's clear they are in the middle of the growth stage. The sales of a product are increasing, production is scaled up and more and more competitors appear. This is the stage in which the biggest profits are achieved. But the strawberry sector also shows characteristics of maturity. The competition is becoming fiercer, with promotions in the sector. Producers are trying to build stronger ties with their clients, and there is product innovation going on.

In the strawberry sector, this product innovation has been going on for years. Not only diversification, but also the development of brands is happening. Innovations like the bubbleberry are to surprise and tempt consumers. These developments are also visible in greenhouse strawberries. Driscoll's introduced the Lusa variety last year, which, combined with a cultivation method, brings the season forward. Veiling Hoogstraten even supplies strawberries year-round.

Special marketing activities are being held as well: last year, Kwekerij de Westlandse Aardbei opened a special pop-up store for its greenhouse strawberries. Product innovations like the strasberry and the pineberry are to surprise and tempt consumers.

### Decline

The activities show the saturation and the growing competition in the sector, but are also important to the sector. It extends the time of the maturity stage in the lifecycle. The maturity stage is the final phase before decline. After introduction, growth and maturity, consumers are familiar with the product, and hardly any new purchases are made. For the fruit and veg sector, this final stage is a bit different: consumer saturation doesn't happen that quickly, but boredom does.

Consumption of other soft fruit products is increasing as well, after all: blueberries, blackberries and raspberries would gladly increase their market share. So for the greenhouse strawberry sector, extending the maturity stage is vital.

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