

"Quality in the belly is more important than money in the pockets"

Bernadette Backers, Organic Shop Owner and Committee Member of the Dutch organic wholesaler De Nieuwe Band speaks about her positive vision for the quinoa. Whereas there might be complaints about extremely high prices, her customers continue enjoying quinoa since their priority is a good quality product of fair origin.

Recorded by Annika Gabriel, 25 October 2013

For how many years are you already selling quinoa?

We sell quinoa since we started with the 'Kardoer' shop. That's around 15 years.

What kind of quinoa are you selling?

We exclusively sell quinoa from the brand 'De Nieuwe Band'. When they were out of stock in summer, we filled this gap with some quinoa from the 'Primeal' brand. But usually, we are supplied only by 'De Nieuwe Band'. We have white, red and black quinoa grains and we sell the flakes.

What do you know about the quinoa's origin?

The quinoa we sell originates from Bolivia which is an important fact for me since it is the traditional land of production (<http://www.nieuweband.nl/producten/detail/1479/?p=g>). I have a Bolivian friend who produces quinoa for her autoconsumption and she informs me about the situation in the Bolivian Altiplano.

At the moment, international traders are concerned about the steadily increasing prices. Do you sense the tension?

We've had a price increase in March in which the price for one kilogramme of quinoa raised from € 7.50 to € 9.95. But our customers buy the quinoa anyway. It seems that for them, the high price is appropriate for the quinoa's health benefits and the opportunities it gives to farmers.

Are you concerned about the increasing prices on producer level?

No, I think the Bolivians do well in having developed a Business attitude and seeing the opportunity to make money with quinoa. They have learned from previous experiences with other goods. It is their right to respond in that way to the capitalist system that is in place. But in fact, I don't know details about how much the farmer profits from the increase in price or if that margin goes to the exporter.

Nevertheless, there is tension between the retailers and they all have different ways in approaching the issue. I know that our suppliers are concerned. But there is no reason to feel guilty for high prices because the prices are not in their hands. To us, the guarantee of a fair and good product and a clear communication is much more important.

Are there other concerns you have if not prices?

Yes, I am worried about the threat of monocultures. I do not know the details but I am wondering about the sustainability of non-traditional farming practices. Additionally, I fear that production could shift towards European or Asian countries. Quinoa belongs to South-America where people produce it with a traditional background. I think that it only creates a grey bluriness when everybody grows everything. And it would be a shame if we would take away the farmers' source of income.

Finally, what is your vision for the future of quinoa?

Quinoa is not gonna become a staple food but rather stay a niche product due to its' special features like being gluten-free and having the potential of becoming an important meat substitute. And just because of its taste. I am sure there will be a future for quinoa!



Bernadette Bakkers in front of her organic shop in Bennekom, the Netherlands