

PRESS RELEASE

More than 3 in 4 Belgians prefer European-grown fruit and vegetables¹

Food safety, taste and quality are most important purchasing criteria. With almost seven out of ten Belgians (68%) eating a daily portion of fruit or vegetables, they score better than most Europeans (Spaniards 63% and Germans 41%). When purchasing fruit and vegetables, consumers give priority to quality, taste, and food safety over other aspects such as variety and price. In addition, 71% also indicate that the quality of European-grown fruit and vegetables is high. This is shown by a large-scale European survey on the perception of fruit and vegetables in the context of the European Cute Solar programme.

Almost 4 in 10 (37%) consumers surveyed say that European cultivation methods inspire confidence in them. Among Belgian consumers, this confidence is even higher: 43%. Moreover, 63% also give a high score to the food safety of food grown in **solar greenhouses**. More than half of the consumers prefer a solar greenhouse as a growing system because they experience it as safe, healthy (53%) and environmentally friendly (50%).

Sustainable cultivation in Europe

The Granada coast and the southern Spanish region of Almeria supply 500 million European residents with sustainable and healthy fruit and vegetables for nine months a year. For example, 96% of the energy in these greenhouses comes directly from the sun, their water footprint is 20 times smaller than that of outdoor crops and 95% of the plastic in the solar greenhouses is recycled. The survey shows that compared to 2020, in 2021 there is an increase in young parents recognising the importance of efficient energy (49% vs. 55%) and of the environmental impact (35% vs. 41%) of **solar greenhouses**.

50% of European consumers have a positive image of the fruit and vegetables grown in solar greenhouses, 36% have no opinion and only 4% have a negative image. The energy efficiency of the greenhouse remains important for consumers (58%), together with the low environmental impact (36%) and the good quality of the products (36%). Three out of ten consumers also link solar greenhouses to a positive social impact for

¹ According to the 2nd European Observatory on the Perception of Fruits and Vegetables, conducted as part of the Cute Solar program "Cultivating the Taste of Europe in Solar Greenhouses".

the region thanks to their job creation. Half of the population (50%) also agrees that the fruit and vegetables from solar greenhouses are naturally beneficial, affordable, and as nutritious as those grown outdoors.

What is a solar greenhouse?

A solar greenhouse is a closed structure covered with a plastic film through which the sun's rays shine, giving the plants the light they need to maintain the right temperature for their development during the winter months so that they can carry out photosynthesis. In the process, the plants produce nutrients from the CO₂ they absorb from the air and release enormous amounts of oxygen into the atmosphere. Solar greenhouses are very different from the production methods used in other greenhouses, which use fossil fuel-based heating and lighting systems that consume up to 30% more energy and are therefore harmful to the environment.

What is NOT a solar greenhouse?

A greenhouse with solar panels that convert light energy into electrical energy that can then be used to artificially heat or illuminate crops.

About Cute Solar

Cute Solar is a promotion programme funded by the European Union (EU) and supported by a consortium of Andalusian fruit and vegetable growers' associations (**APROA**), the Spanish inter-branch fruit and vegetable association (**HORTIESPAÑA**) and the Assembly of European Fruit and Vegetable Growing Regions (**AREFLH**). The aim of the information and promotion campaign is to inform consumers about the sustainable and environmentally friendly production methods, the high standards of greenhouse technology and the quality of European fruit and vegetables.

The programme, with a total investment of €1.95 million, is co-financed by the proposing organisations and the European Union, will run for three years (2020-2022) and will be implemented in Spain, Germany and Belgium.

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