



Brabant: the European crossroads of smart, healthy and sustainable food

The agrofood sector is constantly changing. An internationally leading sector that breeds and brims in the province of North-Brabant. Entrepreneurs, policy specialists and representatives in the agrofood sector from all over Europe took a look behind the scenes recently in Brabant.

In reality, regional policy instruments and funds that should stimulate innovation hardly seem to fit the daily dynamics of the agrofood sector. Sometimes public incentives even counterproductive. That is why seven European regions have joined forces within the EU STRING project. These are North Brabant, French Alsace, Spanish Castillia Y León, Covasna County Romania, Debrecen Hungary, Central Denmark and Regione Emilia Romagna in Italy.

The participating regions compare the way in which they give an innovation boost to the regional agro-food sector. Each region from its own interpretation of the European agenda with an eye for smart, healthy and sustainable food. The province of Noord-Brabant is the crossroads of smart, healthy and sustainable food in Europe. The STRING delegation took a look behind the scenes in North Brabant in recent days. The cross-fertilization between high-tech and agrofood was central.

At Food Tech Brainport in Helmond, we discussed the accessibility of modern technology to accelerate agrifood innovations. Ivo Ploegsma (Manager Food Tech Brainport): *"In our field lab, small agrifood entrepreneurs can technologically test and develop their new products. We lower the risk threshold for entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs can use our latest techniques with advantage for energy consumption, food waste and nutrient value"*. In light of the smart LED technologies of GrowWise Center Philips in Eindhoven, the delegation took a look at the future of (vertical) urban agriculture: *"With help of the latest lighting techniques every day is a perfect day to grow vegetables and herbs. Now, local, fresh products come all year round at your fingertips. Moreover, everyone can grow vegetables and herbs at any place; in the supermarket, on the kitchen table or in an old flat in the middle of the city."*, says Ellis Janssen (Segment Marketing manager City Farming Philips GrowWise)

The delegation visited the high-tech potato grower Jacob van den Borne in Reusel. More with less was the starting point of the precision agriculture pilot project. Jacob van den Borne: *"With this testing ground for precision agriculture, we aim to accelerate innovation and adoption of precision agriculture in the Netherlands, using precision techniques to use less water, minerals, plant protection products and more output in volume and quality"*. Finally, the European delegation at the herbalist Christ Monden of De Kruidenaer got a look at the wonderful world of consumer-driven food systems: *"With our ready-made concept we arrange everything for the customer. All year round we deliver reliability, quality and freshness of our herbs in the customer's kitchen."*, says innovative entrepreneur Christ Monden.