

By Eosta founding director Volkert Engelsman



"Please look after our planet. Cultivate it, pass it on responsibly, so we may do the same. Please look after the soil." This was the urgent plea on behalf of the Youth Food Movement and the world's children, of 20-year-old Nyakallo Makgoba at the closing ceremony of the Celebrating Soil! Celebrating Life! conference in Amsterdam, on June 29.

With the presentation of the Save Our Soils Amsterdam Declaration, the youth urged delegates including ministers, royalty and business leaders to act to stop to soil erosion and degradation.

As an organic fruit & vegetable company we had the honor of organizing and hosting this important conference, backed by the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO). The conference was the main 2015 event of the Save Our Soils campaign that we started a few years ago. I hope we got some people worried. With 24 billion tons of soil worth €1.5 trillion lost per year, these numbers are no mere statistics - without fertile soil, global food security goals are hopeless.

"Soil is not only half of our environment, it's our future", said Rainer Horn, president of the International Union of Soil Scientists; 30 football fields of fertile soil are lost every minute to erosion and degradation, with exploitative agriculture as a main cause. Organic agriculture may not be the only solution to increase soil organic matter and prevent erosion, but it's a proven method with scientific backup. The main message of the Save Our Soils campaign is therefore that consumers can help to save soils by choosing organic products in their daily shopping.

So far we have reached at least 12 million people with this message through social media. When we started the campaign at the end of 2012, it was hard to get a response. The announcement of 2015 as the UN International Year of Soils helped us a lot and our continuous effort is now starting to pay off, thanks to the support of people like Julia Roberts, the Dalai Lama and Desmond Tutu, and thanks to our 200 campaign partners who are helping to spread the message.

We now want to take the soil message to store shelves on a larger scale. In September's "Healthy Soil Weeks" we are spreading the Save Our Soils message in stores throughout Europe, in a joint effort with our retail partners. We want consumer to wake up. Farmers who look after soils are the doctors of the future. But consumers are the 'sleeping giant' - if they only fill their shopping baskets with products that sustain soil health, real change can take place. Every time you do your grocery shopping, you are casting a vote for the kind of world you want.

This is a special year in many ways. In the first place I feel that the UN International Year of Soils will be a turning point in our perception of the living soil. But 2015 is also the year in which we are celebrating the 25th anniversary of Eosta, the company that I founded with a college friend in 1990 under the motto "where ecology meets economy". Instead of throwing an expensive birthday party, we decided to put the money in organising the Celebrating Soil! Celebrating Life! congress, in line with the company's vision.

When I founded Eosta, the purpose was to build a dignified food chain where ecological, social and cultural values are incorporated in the profit definition. We have no choice given the challenges posed by today's society. A market that puts its ecological and social costs on the heads of our children's children is not sustainable in the most literal sense. We need to fight like "Robin Hood" against the idea that the consumer is a neanderthal who is only interested in the lowest price.

The current food market of course has one huge obstacle in the way of sustainability - anonymity. There can be no sustainability without awareness of the effects of our food production methods. That's why we started the Save Our Soils campaign a few years ago, that's why we developed the Nature & More online transparency system over the years. And we see that consumers are hungry for that vision. In August this year, we had the highest monthly turnover of our 25-year long history.

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