

CLOSED PLATFORM MATCHES EXCESS SUPPLY WITH SPOT DEMAND

THE INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA AFFORD OPPORTUNITIES FOR BRINGING TOGETHER BUYERS AND SELLERS. PETER DANIËLS IS TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THAT TO PROVIDE AN EXTRA SERVICE ALONGSIDE HIS SOURCING BUSINESS. GROWERS WITH SURPLUSES, MEET BUYERS WITH SUPPLY GAPS.

Peter Daniëls has been active in the organic and conventional vegetable market for more than 20 years. For the past 11, he's been running his own company, Daniels Organic Fresh Produce (Daniels OFP B.V.). From his office in the Dutch town of Etten-Leur, he handles sourcing for packing stations. His customers provide fresh produce to supermarkets. Most are located in Germany, France and the United Kingdom.

"Our sourcing isn't buying and selling, it's providing a service," Daniels emphasizes. "We work on behalf of our clients. They're the ones buying, usually on a year-round program. We find the suppliers and take care of the whole process – planning, loading and transport, all the way through to administrative processing."

His main business is in onions and carrots. He also handles vegetables such as potatoes, parsnips, parsley root, pumpkins and red beets. During the season he does much of his sourcing in the Netherlands. To accommodate year-round schedules, he turns to other countries, such as Spain for carrots and Egypt for onions.

A solution for surpluses

As someone who eases clients' worries by arranging a steady stream of product, Daniëls has built up a large network of suppliers and buyers. As the centre of that network, he often receives special requests. Sometimes a grower needs a buyer for excess production above what

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they're contracted for. Or they might have a lot with a different size. And once in a while a buyer requires an extra delivery because of an unexpected demand peak or a supply gap. All this inspired Daniëls to develop the online Daniels Sourcing Platform. "The usual solution would be to ask around," he says. "But you can't just ring up quickly every packing station or grower. With an online platform, you can let your whole network know about a batch or request in one go."

An Extranet for customers and suppliers

The platform was built as an extension of Daniëls's Extranet, which he uses to share documents and data with regular customers and suppliers. In August 2020, after a year of development and testing, the Daniels Sourcing Platform was ready. So how does it work for growers? "They can post an offer," Daniëls says. "First, a product alert goes out to a fixed group of users. That's a message with a link to detailed information on quality, size, certification, and so on. Buyers can respond directly. If there's no response, the offer goes online and can be seen by everyone on the platform. We can draw more attention by posting the offer on social media with a link to the platform."

No names, no prices

The Daniels Sourcing Platform isn't an open marketplace, its founder emphasizes. "We bring together supply and demand. We don't post prices, and sellers and buyers stay anonymous until we have a deal." Anonymity protects users' commercial security. Detailed, reliable information about products is needed, however. "A buyer wants to be able to see at a glance: that's suitable for me, or that's not suitable for me. A packing station will only buy if it's clear what the quality is, when the product is available, and how it can be delivered."

Daniëls adds, "As a supplier, you want to avoid a batch being refused because it doesn't meet expectations. Certainly in the UK, post-Brexit,

that's a challenge." He assists suppliers in providing the necessary information. For example, standard quality reports and instructions for product self assessment are available on the platform.

Easy access

Providing all these details appears to be a barrier for some growers. Daniëls invites them to register anyway. "The more people who sign up, the better it works. You only have to say what you grow and what products you could provide. And you'll see requests come up. If someone's looking for something in particular and you're able to provide it, you can respond."

Sourcing for packing stations remains Daniëls OFP's core business; the platform is an extra service. "Online supply and demand will never replace personal relationships in sourcing," he says. "I see this as an extra service for our contacts. Computerization and digitization are a trend that's interesting for growers. The platform lets them explore these new opportunities in an accessible way." ■