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SUSTAINABLE TRADE MUST FOCUS ON NUTRITION: IRO

Conventional agriculture is producing nutritionally deficient fruit and vegetables, and sustainable farmers are in danger of following the same poor practices, according to the chairman of the Titikaveka Growers' Association in the Cook Islands, Teava Iro, who is speaking at the World Export Development Forum in Montreux, Switzerland.

Mr Iro said confusion over a definition of sustainable produce is exacerbating the problem.

"There are so many definitions out there, but to me the real indication of quality is nutritional value," Mr Iro said.

Since World War II, the nutritional value of food has fallen by between 60-70% due to the use of chemicals in agriculture, he claimed.

Instead of different labeling and certification systems, Mr Iro argued that all produce should be rated by its Brix sugar content level which gives a clear indication of nutritional content.

Brix is the measurement of the dissolved sugar to water ratio in a product.

He said farmers should be given the education and the tools to analyze the Brix rating of their produce and be encouraged to use it as a selling point.

Not only do plants with a higher Brix rating improve public health and nutrition, Mr Iro said, they also capture more carbon from the atmosphere helping in the fight against climate change.

He said most cabbages sold today had a sugar level of between five and seven, when it should be more than 12. "Somebody said to me their measurement (of a fruit or vegetable) is its shape and colour, but that does not guarantee nutrition," Mr Iro said.

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