

# The King of Quinoa: Do you know what type of quinoa you're eating and where it's coming from?

In a follow up to the article on the FederBio Integrity Platform in The Organic Standard, Issue 164/2016, Organic Services recently had the privilege of presenting a similar approach to developing an integrity system for Bolivian quinoa (still under consideration), made possible through the support of the Centre for the Promotion of Imports from developing countries (CBI), which is part of the Netherlands Enterprise Agency.

With such strong demand for quinoa, its price has skyrocketed; however, not all quinoa is created equal. Quinoa exists in more than 17 different varieties, traditionally growing from northern Ecuador to southern Bolivia. In the Southern Altiplano of Bolivia, a special type of quinoa is grown, which is adapted to the harsh climatic conditions of this region. Known as Royal Quinoa (Real Quinoa in Spanish), it thrives in this cold, dry and high-altitude climate, resulting in a larger, more nutritious seed.<sup>1</sup>

Quinoa's popularity has led producers outside its historical growing range to start cultivating varieties adapted to their own climates.<sup>2</sup> Reacting to this market encroachment, and to aid consumers in differentiating between the quinoa



A quinoa producer in Bolivia - Source: Bioversity International.

varieties, an effort is underway by various organisations to protect the geographic origin of Royal Quinoa grown in the Southern Altiplano of Bolivia by developing their own standards in addition to the organic standards.

As in the Italian grain market, establishing an integrity system for the entire Royal Quinoa industry requires the participation of multiple players (eg, SENASAG – the competent authority for the Bolivian organic sector, SENAPI - National Intellectual Property Service, associations, businesses and

certification bodies) along the supply chain in Bolivia and in the markets to which Royal Quinoa is exported. The system is designed to establish a product history because its goal is to protect the origin of Royal Quinoa. This means that the system must provide traceability as the quinoa moves from the field to the processing

plant to the warehouse, and further on down the supply chain to its eventual importation and further processing. Essential to this traceability system is the type of data that is recorded as the quinoa moves from one organisation to the next.

The system needs to be able to balance a certain level of detail required to trace quinoa along the supply chain with the efforts required to obtain the data. By building the system around transaction volumes, it will provide the industry with the information it needs to know what was produced according to

1. Real Quinoa <http://www.cabolqui.org/en/real-quinoa/>

2. Quinoa Craze Inspires North America To Start Growing Its Own <http://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2012/11/29/166155875/quinoa-craze-inspires-north-america-to-start-growing-its-own>

## news shorts...

### INTERNATIONAL QUINOA CONFERENCE 2016

The Due to its ability to adapt to harsh environments, including poor saline soils with annual rainfall of as little as 200 mm, quinoa could play a major role as an alternative staple crop in marginal environments. However, the key challenges are: the limited availability of genetic material for cultivation; limited knowledge of the best management practices; little awareness of quinoa's nutritional benefits and the intricacy involved in incorporating it into local diets in regions outside the Andes; and the lack of suitable marketing channels. For that purpose, an international conference, 'Quinoa for Future Food and Nutrition Security in Marginal Environments' will take place from 6-8 December, 2016 at Zayed University, Dubai, UAE. The conference will provide a unique platform for discussions on ecological, economic and social aspects related to the introduction of quinoa for sustainable agricultural production in marginal environments. around the world. ■

More information at: [www.cgiar.org](http://www.cgiar.org)



A picture of Royal Quinoa - Source: [www.cabolqui.org/en/](http://www.cabolqui.org/en/)

its standards and where it went. Protecting the confidentiality of proprietary business information is also an important element of the system.

The integrity system provides assurance by alerting its users to potential non-conformities. If, for example, a Royal Quinoa processor in Bolivia were to purchase quinoa from a producer in Ecuador and tried to pass off the Ecuadorian quinoa as Royal Quinoa from the Southern Altiplano, the integrity system would flag up any transactions that this processor attempts to complete because this quinoa was never recorded in the system at the producer level.

The production amount and the processing amount would not match because all production amounts are recorded in the system. This processor's claim that the Ecuadorian quinoa came from a certified Royal Quinoa producer would not hold up because the amount and transaction would not be traceable in the system. This processor has been caught.

For Bolivia's Royal Quinoa farmers who are organised in grower groups either through their own efforts or through the efforts of a contracting business, opportunities

to create a fully integrated system that begins with their production data being entered in Group Integrity (Organic Services' audit management/internal control system tool for smallholder groups and certifiers), and continues on to Check Organic (Organic Services' supply chain integrity tool), are exciting. This would allow for the seamless flow of data from Group Integrity to the integrity system to Check Organic.

Implementing this project would be a huge win for the Royal Quinoa industry, but most importantly, it means that the many farmers who produce this highly nutritious food and have seen their lives improve from the higher prices for which they can sell their quinoa, will be able to continue to improve their lives. ■

*Will Meister*  
Business development and project  
management  
Organic Services  
[w.meister@organic-services.com](mailto:w.meister@organic-services.com)