



# Extending purchasing tolerances to enable selling of “crooked” carrots and apples

## Overview

### The need

“Second class” fruits and vegetables are often not sold by retailers as it’s believed consumers often prefer “perfect” products. In recent years retailers have started to challenge this notion; selling “imperfect” fruit and vegetables. Many retailers view this as an opportunity to simultaneously reduce food waste and boost sales of otherwise unsaleable products.

### The solution

In order to show its customers that there’s nothing wrong with the quality of so called “ugly fruits or vegetables” or “misfits”, in summer 2017, ALDI SÜD started to sell Class II carrots and apples.

### The benefits

The project further supported the promotion of sustainable consumption. Additionally, the sale of the “Krumme Dinger” was scientifically evaluated to identify the causes of food losses and indicate to ALDI SÜD further reduction potentials.

Discount supermarket changes customer perceptions of “imperfect” fruit and vegetables following the sale of crooked produce across its distribution area in Germany

ALDI SÜD is a large discount supermarket based in Western Germany. It is represented in 11 countries with over 6,200 stores; employing approximately 148,900 individuals, of which about 47,100 are based in Germany [1]. The supermarket sells a wide range of products - around 1,600 core range food and non- food products and 110 specials offered each week.

## Background

As an organisation, ALDI SÜD is committed to climate protection. In 2015, it joined the Paris Climate Agreement; working to keep global warming well below 2°C. In 2017, it became the first large grocery retailer in Germany to achieve carbon neutrality [2].

However, one common problem experienced across the grocery retail sector (contributing to the climate change problem) is consumers’ desire for “perfect” produce. “Too bulky”, “too skewed” and “too crooked” - in the public debate, “requirements for external characteristics of food” are cited as one reason for food waste, particularly in the fruit and vegetable sector [3]. Depending on the product (and also seasonal effects), at some periods between 5 (e.g. apples) and 40 (e.g. carrots) percent of fruit and vegetables do not reach supermarket shelves [4] - partly because of “visual flaws” such as deformations or discolorations.

Raising awareness and changing perception can help to convince consumers that taste is unaffected by visual defects. In Germany, PENNY has been successfully selling fruit and vegetables with shape and colour defects under the name “[Bio-Helden](#)” since 2016.



*"By offering 'second-rate' goods, we are extending our purchasing tolerances and setting an example against food waste in the supply chain. At the same time, we want to convince our customers that even fruit and vegetable products with minor visual defects can still be of excellent taste."*

*Kristina Bell, Group Buying Director and responsible for Quality Assurance and Corporate Responsibility at ALDI SÜD*

## What was the solution?

In 2017, ALDI SÜD decided to take similar action in an aim to understand how much food waste would be reduced by selling "misfit" fruit and vegetables. To do this they proposed a pilot project whereby they would extend their purchasing tolerances on apples and organic carrots. Both products are mainly sourced from Germany and are strong in sales. ALDI SÜD was able to refer to German producers and to make a statement about the real availability of class II products. The aim was that this would draw attention to this cause of food waste, change consumer perceptions and subsequently encourage sustainable consumption.

## Implementation

Under the label "Krumme Dinger" ("crooked things"), ALDI SÜD started to offer Class II organic carrots [Figure 1] from the end of August 2017, and Class II apples from the end of September 2017. "Krumme Dinger" products can have optical blemishes, caused by agricultural conditions, such as weather.



**Figure 1:** Examples of "Krumme Dinger" apples and organic carrots (©ALDI SÜD)

Through REFRESH, ALDI SÜD also collaborated with the Institute for Sustainable Nutrition (iSuN) at Münster University of Applied Sciences, who have been actively involved in the reduction of avoidable food waste for several years. The iSuN were asked to: 1) provide scientific evaluation of "Krumme Dinger" sales, 2) identify the causes of food losses, and 3) identify potential areas for further food waste reduction within the ALDI SÜD supply chain.

Communication on product packaging included a specially developed icon reading



“Crooked in shape. Flawless in taste” and also included storage information for customers: “To maintain the quality, please store the carrots unpacked in the vegetable compartment of your refrigerator.”

## Outcomes

The evaluation of the activity showed, that in the case of carrots, the amount of Class II goods is actually very low. Therefore, the share of additionally marketed fresh goods by the “Krumme Dinger” was marginal. In the case of apples however, the proportion of additionally marketed fresh produce from “Krumme Dinger” is significant.

On the consumption side, it was highlighted that the “Krumme Dinger” contribute to customer sensitisation and to increasing appreciation of food (particularly as the customer actively and consciously decides to purchase the “Krumme Dinger” products).

## Thoughts for the future

Lessons learnt by ALDI SÜD included that the effects on sustainability must be assessed on a case-by-case basis for each type of fruit and vegetable. This is also due to the fact that Class II goods that are not marketed as fresh are usually marketed through other distribution channels such as the processing industry.

Against this background, ALDI SÜD continuously checks for which other products it is worthwhile to also offer consumers as “Krumme Dinger”. This can also depend on external influences (e.g. weather within a season) and decisions can therefore be taken on a seasonal or regional basis.

As part of the ALDI SÜD group, the Austrian retailer HOFER, for example, started in 2018 to also offer field cucumbers, courgettes, tomato and paprika rarities as “Krumme Dinger”.

## References

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