

# talking heads

## Wolf Rohde

**Wolf Rohde was the managing director of the Hamburg Wholesale Market, before he retired on 11 December 2007, having transformed Hamburg into one of the world's leading wholesale markets. The following interview was conducted a few days before Mr Rohde's retirement.**

How did you first get into the fresh produce business?

**WR:** In the autumn of 1968, I joined Hamburg's Agriculture Ministry, dealing with fruit and vegetables. Between 1970 and 1977, I switched to meat.

When did you start working for the Hamburg Wholesale Market?

**WR:** I started my job as the market's managing director in November 1993. I was charged with the task of developing the market into an effective service centre for the industry, reforming the market's management services in the process.

What other roles have you had at the company?

**WR:** From 1977 to 1980, I was responsible for financial matters. From 1980 to 1985 I was deputy managing director with the responsibility for operational management.

What do you see as the biggest challenge facing the fresh produce industry?

**WR:** In Germany, it is the rapid development of discounters.

Since the launch of the Euro in 2002, consumers have become penny-pinching, which has contributed to the demise of independent food retailers and the rise of the discounters. In parts of Europe over the next decade or two, I predict there will be a decrease in the population, which may intensify competition between retailers and further reduce the number of independent food retailers.

Describe your typical day-to-day schedule?

**WR:** The most important part of my day was the market tour between at 6-8am. The wealth of information and feedback I would receive helped me to make good decisions early. In the morning I would make appointments with the market's stakeholders, who usually left by early noon. Appointments with the municipality and other organisations would follow in the afternoon. Then I would tackle the paperwork on my desk!

What was the first thing you would do when you sat down at your desk?

**WR:** I would read the local and national newspapers. On Mondays I would also have to learn the results of the Bundesliga before I could begin my tour of the market!

How much travelling is involved in your work?

**WR:** Around 6-10 trips per year, mostly in Europe.



**Wolf Rohde will continue to work for WUWM on a voluntary basis**

Where have you been lately and where are you planning to go next?

**WR:** I've just been in Poland to attend the 15th anniversary of Poznan Wholesale Market. In January, there is a WUWM (World Union of Wholesale Markets) board meeting in the Hague, and in April, I will be attending a WUWM conference in Mexico, where my period as a full board member will end. I will continue to work voluntarily for WUWM after my retirement.

What do you do to unwind after a tough day at work?

**WR:** My working day was usually 12-15 hours long plus an extra 2.5 hours of travelling. At

the weekend, I would try to see something of my wife! In the summer, I enjoy going to the North Sea or walking through the woods or visiting the theatre.

What will you miss most in retirement?

**WR:** I will miss my many, many friends, colleagues and customers at the Hamburg Market, as well as those based nationally and internationally.

What will you not miss at all?

**WR:** I will not miss my early starts at 4am, nor the early nights at 9pm. I will have to devise a new way of organising my day!