

Nous donnons de la valeur à 37.000 tonnes, plus de cerise ». **GRENADE LA PALMA**

**David del Pino, Granada La Palma's director general, explains throughout this interview which are the strategies that turned this entity into the biggest successful producer of cherry tomato. The key is giving value to each and every of the 37,000,000 kilos marketed.**

**Granada La Palma is the biggest producer of cherry tomato worldwide, how did it affect you that this product became a commodity?**

It affected us quite a lot because our competitors chose varieties with longer shelf lives but maybe less flavourful, which damaged the perception of value that consumers have of this product. Faced with this situation, we fought a diversification policy regarding production, with new shapes, sizes, and colours, but also regarding what I call 'extended product', that is, service, packaging, brand, prestige, trust. All this gives us value and allows for a highlighted presence in any market. We used to offer an only cherry reference and sell 25,000 tonnes of it. Today, we market 37,000 plus tonnes, all thanks to that differentiation.

**How do you work that differentiation?**

As for agricultural aspects, by doing our own research since several years ago. To do that, we have experimental plots where, in collaboration with breeders, we perform works beyond the usual, testing hundreds of pre-commercial breeds which will still take four to five years to reach the market. Thus, we offer both our agricultural and market-related know how, showing them what we consider are the upcoming consumption trends. All this work is complemented with a research team made up by biologists, engineers, and marketing specialists, who try to connect agricultural progresses with the market. Likewise, we developed an international Consumer Panel to which we present our novelties and, after they chose the winners, we bring them to distributors for them to test sales and do a massive launch afterwards if these products yield success. Only 50% of the new presentations achieve success, a figure that could appear small to many but that makes us be pretty proud.

**From the viewpoint of the product, how do you give value added to cherry tomatoes?**

That's maybe the most difficult part as, being an agricultural produce, we depend on climate, weather, and crop management. To solve difficulties, and always aiming at meeting customers' demands, we carry out a very strict product homogenisation process, so that our growers will also work with the same variety, the same root stock, identical phytosanitary and pest-control treatments, and a certain crop management protocol. At our facilities, parameters such as degrees brix and consistence are verified, and if they don't meet the requirements of our protocol, the produce won't be marketed. There is no opportunity for second-class produce hence growers who take the most interest in doing things right.

**Does the market acknowledge and reward that value added?**

Granada La Palma is today present all over the world, and there is one to one thousand business opportunities in each country, the key is finding them. To do that, great efforts are necessary regarding organisation, to be competitive in each market by offering each country the products they may appreciate. Spain for instance is a market which unfortunately lies in the background for us, as only 7 to 8% of our production is traded here. But I trust this situation will change because, although consumers must face economic adjustments, they don't want to give up enjoying

their meals. However, due to the crisis, we only see boring products on retail shelves, favouring low prices. People are nevertheless willing to find nice, fun, flavourful options... and I spy a business opportunity there. Fortunately, distributors are realising that narrowing the range of products they offer has been a mistake and are starting to shift this trend. Therefore, increasing our presence in the Spanish market with such a different product as ours is a real challenge.

Source : MERCADOS magazine