

Netherlands, "Bad summer expected in greenhouse vegetables market"

The first volumes of greenhouse vegetables usually reach good prices in May, but this year it will not be the case. Due to the high temperatures, the production is already in full swing, and prices are very low. "If we look at the market, it seems that we are already in mid-summer.

And then a terrible summer will come," regrets Rony Ceuster, from Comprá. "It's a busy time, but vegetables are sold for very little. The season has started nearly a month earlier, catching us by surprise, so we are really busy." Rony has been active in trade for years, but has never experienced such a situation. "It is extraordinary, and I think the producers are following the situation with huge concerns."

Dramatically low prices

For most products, prices have fallen to dramatic levels. "To give just one example: cucumbers now stand at around 10 cents, with eventual intervention prices as low as 6 cents. Also for tomatoes is the situation dreadful.

I had never seen prices between 40 and 50 cents before 1 May. Lettuce and cucumbers are already being discarded. There is too much even of alternative lettuce varieties."

The fact that low prices and big supply volumes are bringing lots of work for his company is, according to Rony, the only positive aspect. "But in terms of prices, it is all too little. Even for courgettes, despite there being some shortages, prices were of between 40 and 50 cents on 30 April.

Nevertheless, I expect that this will not last much longer, as we are reaching a boiling point." He pointed out that there is already a massive supply of strawberries, "with prices standing between 1.10 and 1.20 Euro for the premium quality."

Dutch growers head to Belgium

Quite strikingly, more and more Dutch growers are seeking refuge in Belgium. "They cross the border and sell their products through auctions. Especially with cucumbers, asparagus, courgettes, aubergines, endive and peppers, you can see that Dutch growers expect to obtain better prices here, even though ultimately it does not make much of a difference.

The difference between the Dutch and Belgian markets is minimal. Some Belgians have a lot more to offer in terms of quality, especially Flanders, and the prices obtained by growers are slightly higher. But in return, of course, a higher effort is needed to achieve that quality."

Overproduction

The Ceuster is not a pessimist by nature, but he does not expect these negative trends to end quickly. "I am concerned especially for the growers. Perhaps this season will still give us a few exceptional days with less produce. Shortages for certain products may happen in a few weeks, but that will be the exception.

For the time being, the market is flooded, something which he already saw coming years ahead. "Production volumes in Europe continue to increase. Every year there are acreage expansions, especially in countries like Germany, Poland and the Czech Republic. Germany is becoming more self-sufficient in the field of lettuce, while 10

years ago, trucks full of lettuce were being imported. It's like a bad movie; small growers disappearing and larger producers taking over." He does not know how long will it take for the situation to change. "Over the past few years, many bubbles have burst and this is not over yet."

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