

Spain: "Despite the New Delhi virus, courgette acreage could grow by 25%"

El Plantel Semilleros S.L., founded in 1996, by Manuel Escudero and Francisco Escudero in Mojonera, Almeria, is a supplier of integrated solutions for crop sowing and germination.

Following their success and the trust deposited on them by growers, the founders opened new offices under the same quality standards in San Agustín in 2004, Dalías in 2007 and Nijar in 2010, all with organic production, as well as in Vicar in 2012. The next opening is planned for 2016 in El Ejido.



Manuel Escudero, founder and manager of El Plantel Semilleros

Nowadays, El Plantel Semilleros already owns 17 hectares and has over 18 years' experience in the supply of plants to growers in Almeria. Just last year they sold about 92,000 million plants of pepper, tomato, cucumber, courgette, aubergine, beans, melon and watermelon; Almeria's most traditional horticultural crops.

Heat accelerates plant growth and the onset of disease

At present, the vegetable sowing and transplanting stages are underway. In an interview with Manuel Escudero, current manager of El Plantel, we asked about their preliminary estimates for crop development, taking into account the weather conditions until now, which, according to Manuel, will have a very clear impact on the production, although it is difficult as of yet to know exactly what will happen in three months.

"The two weeks of intense heat that we are experiencing is causing the crops to develop too quickly, with longer internodes and even some fruit abortion due to the excessive heat," he explains. "It is true, however, that if the weather conditions right now changed and temperatures cooled down a little, we would manage to slow down the plants' growth and also delay the production, which would allow us to reach the

final stage of the campaign in a much better situation. A sudden change in terms of rain or cold temperatures would also be negative right now."

In the meantime, the more serious issues have to do with diseases. "They are arriving much earlier than in previous years, such as in the case of the New Delhi virus on courgettes, which seemed almost non-existent a fortnight ago and it is now becoming unstoppable," he says.

Despite the New Delhi, courgette acreage continues to grow

El Plantel Semilleros has expertise in any type of horticultural product, and courgettes, without a doubt, are one of their specialities in any medium and substrate.



El Plantel Semilleros' courgette plants

There are many types of courgette, but some of the most popular are black, white, yellow and round courgettes.

At this time of the season, Noelia Robles points out that, in her case, the most demanded courgettes are the Victoria (three times as much as the rest), Sinatra, Natura, Cronos, Prometheus and the latest addition to the range, the Gloria.

Courgette producers "had nightmares" last season with the New Delhi virus, which spreads via whitefly and which led to the destruction of many plants, which had a huge impact on the harvest. However, despite what we may think, "demand continues to increase by more than 25% compared to last year," said Manuel. "The virus, in any case, has not slowed growers down," he adds.

According to Manuel, the explanation for this may be the low initial investment that growing courgettes requires and how quickly you can start harvesting; factors which, in times of recession like the present, can influence the growers' decisions.



"The reasons are still not very clear, but we believe it is due to the very low initial investment. The price of seeds is below average and does not require much labour. It also becomes productive fairly quickly, allowing growers to recover the investment. With any other type of crop it takes ninety days to harvest, while with courgettes this is reduced to just thirty days," he explains.

Lastly, we asked Manuel Escudero if the solution to tackle this virus would be to introduce a more resistant courgette variety.

"We have not heard yet of any New Delhi virus-resistant variety, but we are sure that seed companies are making an effort when it comes to research in order to be the first ones to get it."

"Although finding a resistant variety would be the most ideal scenario, meanwhile it is clear that the solution is to set up traps, perform phytosanitary treatments, be equipped with integrated control and use anything else that may help," he believes.

"Another important aspect to be taken into account by the grower would be to avoid stacking virus-infected plants next to the greenhouses for them to be collected by trucks from composting plants, as this only facilitates the flies spreading," concludes Manuel Escudero.

source : [http://www.freshplaza.com/article/126601/Spain-Despite-the-New-Delhi-virus,-courgette-acreage-could-grow-by-25-procent\(08/09/2014\)](http://www.freshplaza.com/article/126601/Spain-Despite-the-New-Delhi-virus,-courgette-acreage-could-grow-by-25-procent(08/09/2014))