

Morocco increases shipments to Russia by more than 25% **Since Russian veto, Spanish citrus look towards Asia and Canada**

After the ban on European imports, Morocco has become Russia's most viable alternative to Spain for the supply of horticultural products. Compared to the 2013/2014 campaign, Russian demand for Moroccan products has grown by about 30%.

"Although we are still not sure about what will happen this season, we can say that Moroccan shipments to Russia have increased significantly compared to last year," said Tomás Amer, manager of Agri-Naturelle S.A.R.L., an importer and exporter of horticultural products from Morocco and Spain.

"We expect the price of Moroccan commodity horticultural products such as tomatoes, peppers and cucumbers to increase with the growth in demand, considering that the campaign will not start for another two or three weeks and stocks may even run out much earlier than usual," continues Amer.

Something similar is happening already with citrus, of which Spain shipped about 25% of its exports to Russia. Currently, Morocco has gone from making 45% of its citrus shipments to Russia to more than 70%. "Given that the transit time of a container from Morocco to Russia is about nine days, it becomes the most viable option for Russian importers," he affirms.

"At the moment, Morocco is exporting large volumes of clementines at higher prices than last year, mainly due to increased demand from Russia, while in Spain we are already shipping large amounts of lemons, and prices, which started at high levels due to shortages in the Southern Hemisphere, are already stabilising," explains Tomás Amer. "Similarly, the prices of Spanish clementines are also expected to drop in the coming weeks."

While Morocco has increased its presence in Russia, Spain has been forced to seek new alternative markets; for now, it has found opportunities in Asia and Canada. "We have already made shipments to Hong Kong and will continue with weekly shipments to the port of Shanghai. Additionally, we are expecting to close deals in Canada," explains Amer.

"Contrary to what many may believe, Shanghai demands premium quality lemons, and in that sense the Moroccan product is no match for the Spanish. Morocco, in addition to small volumes, does not have Murcia's know-how or its unbeatable climate and soil conditions," assures Amer.

"However, Spain still has much work to do in terms of alternative export markets," he points out. "Spanish exporters are somewhat perplexed by the passivity of the

Spanish Government when it comes to the signing of protocols with emerging countries like China, and three months after the implementation of the Russian veto."

"Spain has only signed a protocol with China for the export of citrus fruits and other products cannot be shipped if not via Hong Kong, where operations are much more expensive due to tariffs and transport. China is more than ready in terms of logistics to import our products and would be an interesting market for Spanish growers, who would gain competitiveness in a market where Latin American countries such as Chile and Argentina have already been largely successful."

Through collaboration between Moroccan and Spanish producers, the firm Agri-Naturelle S.A.R.L. is devoted to exporting all kinds of products from these countries, mostly to Europe, Russia and Asia.

"We believe that with the produce from Spain and Morocco we can meet all demands worldwide, as they can offer a large supply of horticultural products over a long production schedule."

Source: www.freshplaza.com/ 14/11/2014