

## Spain: Market situation pushes strawberry prices down 73%

The price of early strawberries early in the campaign fell by 73% compared with the previous season. An excessive production of extra-early varieties and the competition have been the key factors to explain the decline.

No one doubts anymore the actual impact of climate change on certain economic sectors; a topic which was thoroughly discussed during the summit that took place last December in Paris and in which a minimal agreement was reached to fight against it at international level. Agriculture, due to its direct relationship with the weather, could be one of the most affected and, in fact, Huelva may already be suffering the first consequences of this phenomenon.

The fact is that, in recent weeks, Huelva's strawberries have had to overcome the first bump of the current campaign, partly due to the weather, and more specifically to the lack of cold this winter. This, together with other factors, has caused strawberries, and also raspberries to a lesser extent, to register considerable price drops, reaching levels that can hardly be compared with those of initial stages of previous seasons; a fact that has even been described as "disastrous" by some producers in Huelva.

In actual figures, and despite the good start of the season (November-December 2015), prices in the period between the last week of December 2015 and the first week of 2016 have plummeted, falling even below the production costs. According to data collected by Huelva Información, a kilo of strawberries stood in the markets at between 80 cents and 1.1 Euro (an average of 0.95 Euro), while at the same time in previous years prices ranged between three and four Euro (an average of 3.5 Euro). Of this gross price, growers have only received between 40 and 60 cents, with the rest going to broker fees, transport and packaging. Revenues stood substantially below the cost of production, which is of around 0.90 Euro.

At the moment, prices have recovered somewhat, ranging between 1.8 and 2 Euro (with approximately 1.25 Euro for the producer), which can be considered a relative return to normality, although not as good as desired, considering that we are still at the beginning of the campaign.

Antonio Luis Martín González, Huelva-based producer and representative of the Union of Small Producers (UPA) in the province, believes that the main reasons for this have been the excess of extra-early varieties that have been planted this year, especially Splendor, Primoris, San Andreas or Fortuna, and the mild temperatures registered this winter, as to this day there has virtually been no cold at all. "Production has soared, the markets have become saturated and the price has come down," states Martín González.

The provincial head of UPA affirms that to this we must add the large volume of early fruit grown at the same time in Morocco, which has also planted a lot of Fortuna, as well as other varieties intended for early production.

Despite all this, the producer predicts a good campaign this year, especially when compared to those immediately preceding it, because Huelva has also planted a large area with Primoris, a variety that will make it possible to regularise the market thanks

to its greater post-harvest shelf life (of 7 to 8 days), compared to more traditional varieties (3 to 4 days), which "will allow fruit to be exported, with a much greater quality assurance, to more distant destinations and markets."

The Primoris is a variety that is purely from Huelva; the strawberry is currently the most demanded by important markets such as France, since in addition to a longer shelf life, it has a higher Brix and that entails a sweeter fruit.

Antonio Luis Marin also predicts a good campaign as a result of the increasing diversification of the production, which in quantitative terms, and according to data handled by Freshuelva, will result in a reduction in the number of strawberry plantings by 8.73 percent (last year, 6,400 hectares were planted, compared to 5,860 this year), while other red fruits will see a 25% increase in their plantings. Raspberries have grown from 1,560 hectares in 2015 to 1,815 hectares this year (+16 percent); blackberries have gone from 90 to 130 hectares (a 44 percent increase), and blueberries have grown from 1,470 to 1,953 hectares (+33%). In the latter's case, however, it is necessary to take into account that the plants only become commercially productive in the third year after the planting.

The provincial head of UPA also predicts that this situation could result, over the course of this campaign, in additional problems derived directly from the "lack of manpower at some very specific moments. Martín González is specifically talking about the months of April and March, when, in his opinion, "we will have to spread out the labourers, given the clash at that time of the highest levels of production of different products. In this sense, UPA intends to strengthen the dialogue between unions, employers and the Government in order to find the best solution for all parties.

Source: [huelvainformacion.es](http://huelvainformacion.es) <http://www.freshplaza.com/article/152086/Spain-Market-situation-pushes-strawberry-prices-down-73-procent> (21-01-2016)