

Spain: 25% fewer oranges in Cordoba

The orange harvest campaign has just passed its peak, with around 50-60% of the total production harvested; consequently, producers have already made their estimations. The president of the association Palmanaranja, Antonio Carmona, predicts a production decline of about 20-25% compared to last year "because of the heat in May, as well as the smaller calibres due to the lack of rainfall." In fact, irrigation communities such as that of Bembézar have already informed their members about a reduction in the water supply, which will amount to 4,000 cubic metres per hectare. This drop in citrus production volumes affects the Guadalquivir Valley, where around 350 million kilos are produced, but also other areas.

At national level, and for Spain's main competitors (Morocco, Egypt and Turkey), the situation has been the same; something which has had a positive impact, as it has translated into an increase in prices. "This will compensate in most cases for the general loss of production, and there will especially be a turnaround in trends, boosting the sale of our own products," said Carmona, who recalled that "this comes after three years with a crisis in profitability which sometimes led us to consider abandoning the crops."

Currently, the Asian market (China or South Korea) has increased its demand; still, estimates of Agricultural Transformation Societies (SAT) like Sunaran predict that, by the end of campaign, a total of 40 million kilos will have been shipped, which is ten million less than in the previous season. "I think it can be a positive campaign for the producer, given the satisfaction of having the chance to sell their fruit with some peace of mind. We could have a positive balance and this will also benefit non-associated producers," predicted Carmona, who in turn is also a manager at Sunaran. In his view, "perhaps the most negative effect from the loss in volumes will unfortunately be the loss of wages during the harvest."

Carmona also addressed the information regarding the lack of association between producers, since in the region of La Vega del Guadalquivir only 40% of producers are associated. Thus, he links this situation to "a structural problem and a mixture of cultures, with many opportunities for the producers," since in Palma del Rio, for many years, growers found themselves "comfortable on their own." "It is true that citrus producer associations should offer more guarantees than we are at the moment, but we are taking things slowly in a highly competitive industry," he admitted.

Back in the day, citrus Producer Organizations were created under Europe's protection, with grants that would allow for a greater concentration of supply and "there were companies that were indeed devoted to concentration, while others merely received the subsidies," he explains. Carmona also says that, after that boom in the creation of farms in 1990, when there was a balance between supply and demand, in 2008 the reform of the CAP subsidies removed and changed the roadmap and "we had to adapt to selling in a free market."

The president of Palmanaranja also made a comment regarding the open document analysing the citrus sector, debated in the latest meeting, and assured that it has "wonderful intentions;" nevertheless, he warned that we must be careful because "we

could inadvertently damage our image abroad when generalising about these issues." To tackle the situation affecting the orange sector, Carmona advocated for meetings to be held between all agents involved in order to reflect on what is happening and "try to make improvements from within, preparing a good plan to that end, and once that is done, go to the Government and explain to them how they can help."

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