

Spain: Improvement in quality and value of Basque tomatoes

The Basque Institute for Agricultural Research and Development, Neiker-Tecnalia, a public company under the Department of Economic Development and Competitiveness of the Basque Government, has launched the Traditom project, which aims to genetically identify and select the Basque Country's best traditional tomato varieties. This initiative seeks to add value to local products and ensure producers can grow tomatoes of high quality, productivity and culinary value and allow them to meet the growing demand for traditional tomato varieties. Specialists at the technology centre will conduct research on the range of traditional Basque tomatoes stored at Neiker-Tecnalia's genebank.

Consumers are increasingly demanding local vegetable with an authentic flavour, but producers cannot always meet this demand. This is because traditional varieties have a number of problems, which Neiker-Tecnalia is trying to tackle. The first is that these varieties are highly variable when it comes to external appearance, sensory quality and productivity. Also, they are not particularly resistant to the most common and important diseases, such as viral infections.

Researchers at the technology centre will seek to address these problems through genetic selection of the best traditional Basque varieties. The main parameters taken into account in this process will be the products' organoleptic quality and their popularity amongst consumers. The genetic characterization will also allow for each variety to be accurately defined, making it possible to distinguish them effectively from other traditional or commercial varieties with similar morphological characteristics.

Resistance to diseases will be another parameter to be taken into account when selecting the genetic material. Specifically, the focus will be on the two main pathogens affecting tomatoes: the Tomato Mosaic Virus (ToMV) and the fungus *Phytophthora infestans*, which limit their profitability.

Differentiating tomatoes and preventing unfair competition

The identification and characterization of varieties opens the way to creating distinctive quality labels, such as a Protected Designation of Origin or a Protected Geographical Indication. These will make it possible for the products to stand out, highlighting their most unique and appreciated features, while at the same time preventing unfair competition and making it easier for consumers to identify them.

The selection and breeding of Basque tomatoes will give producers the opportunity to supply a quality product demanded by the market, which will entail improvements in the competitiveness of local agriculture. Likewise, the cultivation of these varieties will contribute to environmental friendliness and biodiversity, ensuring that future generations can enjoy quality local products.

Successful traditional varieties

Current consumer trends, as observed in movements such as Slow Food, Locavorismo and Food Miles, are giving rise to a gastronomy based on local products of high culinary value, which are becoming an important niche for producers committed to

cultivating traditional varieties. A number of tomato varieties are currently hitting the market with much success, including the Valenciana (Valencia), Montserrat (Catalonia), Rosa de Barbastro (Aragon) and Aretxabaleta (Basque Country).

Source : <http://www.freshplaza.com/12/02/2016>