

## **Almeria loses 3,000 hectares of tomato to low prices**

The effects of the Russian veto continue and they are particularly affecting tomato, which is going through a rough patch. In the last three years, Almeria has lost 3,000 hectares of tomato crops after producers abandoned them because of the product's low prices. This province, which has 10,000 hectares devoted to this crop and harvests around one million tons of tomatoes per year, is the largest producer of fresh tomatoes in Spain and produces about a quarter of the total national production.

After the Russian veto, the European market has had to absorb Almeria's specialties, such as the Pear, Cherry, or Cocktail tomato varieties. Unfortunately, Europe is not willing to pay more for these varieties, as the Russians did. "Currently, producers are being paid about 30 cents per kilo for the pear variety, when production costs are about 35 cents. Sadly, 30 cents is the highest price paid in the entire campaign," complained Francisco Vargas, president of Asaja Almeria.

Cherry tomatoes are undergoing the same situation; production costs amount to nearly 1 to 1.10 euro / kilo, and farmers only receive an average of about 80 cents per kilo. "The only exception is vine tomatoes. They are currently being paid at 80 cents per kilo and they only cost about 40 cents per kilo. However, we should note that the market started paying these prices 15 days ago after averages were down," Vargas said.

### **The Russian veto**

The Russian veto affects Spanish tomato producers twice. Russia has closed its borders to Turkish tomato because of political problems between both countries. As a result, Turkey has increased its tomato exports to Europe, and since their product has a lower quality than the Spanish one, prices have begun to decrease.

The Spanish tomato, which has a higher quality and must pass stricter controls, is competing against a massive influx of tomato from Morocco and Turkey that does not have to meet the same food safety controls and traceability that it must meet. "In return for controlling the Syrian border because of the refugee problem, Europe will buy the Turkish tomatoes, which are of a lower quality and have residue and plant protection problems, in a preferential manner," stated the president of Asaja Almeria.

Some operators are taking advantage of this situation to keep pushing prices downward. "Aldi and Lidl have become stronger and producers who refuse to sell at those prices are being punished and they don't buy their products for weeks." Meanwhile, farmers are concerned with their bottom line because, by the end of the campaign, they have only recovered about 30,000 Euro of the 55,000 Euro it cost them to produce a hectare.