

Spain: Research to be carried out on horticultural crop diseases

The Association for the Phytosanitary Protection of Leek, Carrot and Onion of Castile-Leon, Asoprofit, was set up in March 2015 as a liaison with the administration in the fight against the diseases that currently affect these crops, and which can cause the loss of up to 30% of the production. In fact, in some cases, such as that of leeks, the losses can affect the entire production, as has already happened in some campaigns.

According to José Nieto, president of Asoprofit, which brings together seventy five producers, eleven handling facilities and seven agro-food industries, this is a major problem that take a toll, not just on the yields, but also on the economy of producers. The Association represents 2,200 hectares, which is half of the area devoted to these crops in the region.

In 2017, Itacyl will launch a research project focused on the study of the diseases affecting leeks, carrots and onions, which will have a budget of 80,000 Euro spread over four years. Horticultural crops are threatened by a bacterium that attacks them by rotting the plant. The trials that will be carried out by the regional government and Asoprofit will aim to determine how it is transmitted. It is believed that this disease could be linked to a vector, the psilas, which can be transmitted to the seeds, as well.

For this reason, the Association has highlighted the importance of the research that will be carried out in the next plantings, starting in February. One of the challenges is to control the vectors before they reproduce, and also to determine how the disease develops, in order to be prepared.

Castile-Leon has about 4,000 hectares of these crops, 2,150 of which correspond to carrots, 950 hectares to leek, and 840 to onion, mainly in the provinces of Valladolid, Avila and Segovia. This area supplies carrots to all of Spain, and parts of Portugal, for over half of the year.

It has not been a bad year for these crops, according to Asoprofit. The carrot campaign started very well, with prices somewhat higher than the production costs, while for leeks, there has been some shortage in the market. Onions are purchased mainly to be dehydrated.

For the short and medium term, the president of the Association has set the challenge of controlling the phytosanitary problems that have been causing so much concern to the Region's horticultural sector. That is the first goal. In a second stage, according to José Nieto, they will address other matters that are also considered important, and that have to do with the markets. It should not be forgotten that the costs that producers are facing are very high. Growers need to invest some 6,000 Euro to be able to produce one hectare of carrots; a cost that rises to 10,000 Euro in the case of leeks.

Asoprofit has also talked about other future challenges related to Designations of Origin and Certification Marks. Regarding the trials that will be carried out next year, the Association confirms that the regional government has expressed its commitment to analysing the seed batches free of charge for its partners.

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