

# OVERVIEW GLOBAL COURGETTE MARKET

The market situation for courgettes in Europe has been determined by the snow and frost in the south of the continent, which has caused shortages in many countries and huge losses in Spain and Italy. In the US, the cold has also taken a toll and a smaller volume is expected.

## Substantial price increases in Italy

The situation affects mostly the regions of Sicily, Lazio, Puglia, Piedmont, Campania, Veneto, Calabria and Emilia-Romagna. In the past, consumption peaked in the summer, but thanks to the supply of greenhouse crops, consumption has increased year round. Greenhouse cultivation concentrates mainly in Sicily and Lazio. The acreage in Piedmont is stable, with 750 hectares. Of these, 80% are in the open ground and 20% in tunnels.

As a result of the cold snap this month, which has mostly hit the south of the country, there has been a sharp drop in the supply of vegetables. Southern Italy has lost an average of 70% of the production, with peaks of up to 90%. This obviously has consequences for the consumers, who have to pay higher prices. In the south east of Sicily, 60% of the courgette production has been lost. Furthermore, the acreage has been reduced, further driving up the price increase.

Between 30 December and 13 January, hefty price increases were already reported. On the wholesale market in Bologna the price increased by 43% (from 2.60 to 3.71 Euro/kg). In Turin, the price increased also from 0.95-2.75 Euro/kg to 3.25-7.05 Euro/kg on 19 January. In Fondi, the price increased from 2.35-3 Euro/kg to 3.20-5.60 Euro/kg.

## UK: empty shelves

The pictures of empty courgette shelves in British supermarkets are now common. As a result of the severe winter weather in Spain, the supply has virtually ground to a halt, thus affecting the supply to supermarkets. The high prices of the vegetable even motivated the theft of three pallets at a depot in London. "When you take into account that three pallets of courgettes

have a value of £11,000 and you can sell the product quickly, you understand that it is attractive for criminals to steal vegetables to get money fast," explains a trader.

### **Belgian imports expensive**

Belgium is currently importing courgettes. According to a Spanish importer, there is a very scarce supply of Spanish courgettes due to the colder weather in Spain, so prices have been skyrocketing. On Monday, 16 January, they reached 24 Euro per case (5 kilos). Prices had already been high for some time, mainly because of shortages caused by the New Delhi virus.

### **The Netherlands and Belgium: uncertain about new season**

According to the CBS, the acreage devoted to courgettes in the Netherlands has grown considerably in recent years, from 150 hectares in 2000 to 306 in 2015. The yield has grown accordingly in the same period, from 11 to 18.4 million kilos. The acreage devoted to courgettes in Flanders is greater and stands at around 400 hectares.

The Dutch courgette harvest starts with the harvest in the greenhouses, although most Dutch crops are in the open ground. Last year, part of the open ground cultivation was affected by rains and hail in June, but afterwards there were a lot of new plantings. The warm weather and growing acreage in the autumn resulted in great production figures. Prices started to drop from mid-summer.

This year, the courgette acreage under glass seems to be quite similar to that of the previous one, but the figure is always variable. It is relatively easy to set up new crops in a rented greenhouse and current reports of the courgette crisis could very well result in the acreage growing again. The acreage devoted to the specialty yellow courgette grew last year, but after disappointing results it dropped back again. The greenhouse acreage planted with round courgettes appears to remain fairly stable.

### **France**

Early this week, the courgettes planted by French growers yielded between 2.94 and 4.81 Euro. Besides the domestic production, there is also supply from countries such as Spain, Italy, Turkey, Morocco and the US. On 16 January, the prices for imported courgettes stood at the following levels:

- Spain 2.60-4.20 Euro
- Italy 2.60-4.05 Euro
- Turkey 2.10-3 Euro
- US (only organic) 3.16-3.38 Euro

### **Russia imports from Iran**

Courgettes are a popular product in Russia, but not an essential part of the Russian menu. The demand peaks in the spring and summer, which is when courgettes are used in summer dishes. "Courgette pasta, which is usually consumed in August and September, is quite popular," explains a trader. In the summer months there is supply from the south of the country. In the winter months, the product is imported from several countries, including Iran. "Our customers ask for light green, medium courgettes," affirms a trader.

### **No export of fresh courgettes from China**

Northern China supplies the market with courgettes in the summer, while in the winter months the supply moves to the south of the country. The bulk of the crop is grown in small farms and in the open ground. The share of greenhouse crops is on the rise, but is still limited. This sort of cultivation is to be found mainly in the Shandong region. The weather is currently stable and the winter months are mild. The production is stable. China does not export fresh courgettes, but the product is traded across the border in processed or frozen form.

### **Also cold weather in US**

The US is also facing the impact of cold weather; therefore, the supply of many crops, including courgettes, is lower than normal, as reported by a trader. Incidentally, the trader affirms that the supply from Mexico is also limited. The US importer is therefore looking for supply in the Dominican Republic and Honduras, whose season runs from November to May.

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