

## Spain: Intensive avocado cultivation recommended in Huelva

The cultivation of avocados has good potential in the province of Huelva, according to the agronomist Gonzalo Allendes Lagos, corporate director of AGQ Labs, who gave a lecture on this product at the University of Huelva (UHU). In his opinion, the crop would be profitable in this area of Andalusia with an intensive system and an adequate and expert management.

Allendes assures that the climatic conditions in some parts of the province of Huelva are similar to Chile's, where this product has been traditionally cultivated with good results. One of the keys is that the province of Huelva has a cold period in winter, but there is no frost, which is essential for the avocado plant to develop normally.

The expert on avocado cultivation has been invited by the Colegio Oficial de Ingenieros Técnicos Agrícolas de Andalucía Occidental, COITAND, in an event sponsored by Viveros Grajera and Dagrissur and held at the UHU. The agronomist was joined by COITAND's president in Huelva, Julio Volante, and UHU professor Antonio Domínguez.

The conference has evidently aroused interest among the students of the University and some of the province's producers, as indicated by the fact that the hall of the Faculty of Law where the event took place was full.

The agronomist gave a detailed explanation about the conditions that the crop requires, as well as the possible problems and benefits; knowledge based on years of study and his own experience as a cultivation technician.

Gonzalo Allendes pointed out that another of Huelva's advantages is that it is an early productive zone with a temperate climate, which facilitates the uniformity of the fruit's calibre, in addition to insisting that the mild winter cold season is important for the development of avocados, which also require a prolonged warm period.

Thus, one of the biggest risks to the plant is an excess of water, "as that kills it directly, without a chance for recovery," while a lack of water will only cause production losses.

According to global marketing forecasts, the demand for avocados is on the rise in all markets, and consequently a number of Ibero-American countries are preparing to increase their production. This, in any case, is something that also creates opportunities in other areas of the world with similar climatological conditions, as is the case of some areas of southern Europe, including Andalusia. In fact, tropical crops are already settled in other Andalusian provinces, such as Granada and Malaga.

For Gonzalo Allendes, the first step to becoming successful with this crop is "to carry out a suitable preparation of the soil." It has to be in optimal condition, so that the roots develop in the best possible manner without facing obstacles that would soon reduce the chances of success for the plantation.

Another issue to consider is the pruning of the tree to prevent it from growing too much, which can make the harvesting of the fruit complicated and costly. This also allows 60-70% of the tree to be used for production. One of the techniques that Allendes has recommended is cutting the branches in a way that brings the fruit production closer to the ground.

Allendes recommends the intensive cultivation of avocados to gain profitability, although it is also essential to leave sufficient space to allow the passage of vehicles, like tractors. Average avocado yields amount to around 20 tonnes per hectare with a cultivation cost of 10,000 Euro.

Lastly, another of the issues to be studied properly is the variety that has to be cultivated in order to fulfil the grower's expectations.

The global avocado production stands at 4,300,000 tonnes and is expected to continue growing at an accelerated pace, although it is also estimated to be insufficient to meet the expected demand.

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