

Portugal: Fundão cherries to explore new markets with Chile

The famous cherry of Fundão, a region of central Portugal that borders with Spain's Cáceres, will launch a series of actions to close deals with Chile to market this product and explore new markets, such as China.

The mayor of Fundão, Paulo Fernandes, said this Thursday during the symbolic auction of the season's first two kilos, held in Lisbon, that "Chile is the largest exporter of cherries in the world, which is why we will develop joint actions with them."

Fundão will get to know one of Chile's innovation centers, as the City Council there wants to launch research actions on biotechnology and how cherries can be used in the area of health. Regarding biotechnology, Fernandes said that they intend to develop actions to add value to their most important variety, which they call *saco*, a very sweet cherry that has a hard texture, something that is very valued in exports.

Fernandes said that the region of Fundão is one of the places in the world where the cherry ripens earlier and that, three years ago, the market paid 64 euro for a kilo of cherries that matured at the end of April.

Fundão cherry employs 400 farmers in this area and produces an average of 7,000 tons every year.

Fernandes also said that the added value obtained from the transformation of the cherries was of the utmost importance in their sales, as they sold 40 different products the "Cereza de Fundão" brand.

Some of the products made with this fruit include lollipops, tea, chocolates, liqueurs, chorizo, energy bars, jams, cosmetics, and medicinal products.

"It is one of the top five most important and most prestigious fruit brands in Portugal, such as the Madeira banana," he said.

To preserve and reforest the Sierra de la Gardunha in order to regenerate its orchards, the City Council of Fundão has promoted this year a campaign to sponsor the cherry trees, in which anyone who pays 20 euro to sponsor a tree will have discounts in tourist accommodation and restaurants in this region.

These actions have allowed producers to increase the region's cherry planted area by 10% every year. Currently, there are about 2,000 hectares planted with different cherry varieties, which represent an economic movement of 20 million euro, in fresh fruit and added value sales.

Another innovation is the greenhouse cultivation of cherry trees to control and maintain an ideal temperature. The first 20 hectares in Portugal were planted this year and they should start to bear fruits in about four or five years.

At the auction held today, two kilos of cherry were sold to the famous Portuguese chef Vitor Sobral at 300 euro.

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