

Spain: Strawberries and blueberries affected by cold temperatures

Strawberries and blueberries are suffering the impact of the low temperatures recorded since the beginning of 2018. The cold delayed the start of the strawberry campaign and caused the volume harvested to be lower than usual. This berry has been the most affected by the weather and Spanish producers had again been relying on its profitability. The acreage increased to 5,890 hectares, which is 9% more than in the previous year. But the cold has taken a toll on the development of the plants and damaged their production, just at the time when prices are higher.

However, the value of strawberries will continue to rise in the markets thanks, in part, to the upward trend in the consumption of healthy foods. The previous season also kicked off with a delay (although not as acute) due to the weather, and with a 7% drop in the acreage, but eventually, the volume harvested reached a market value of 454.66 million Euro (1.18 €/kg); that is, 15% more than in the 2015-2016 campaign. Fresón de Palos, Cuna de Platero and Arofa were the largest national strawberry producers in 2017, followed by the cooperatives Onubafruit and Fruta de Andalucía.

Blueberries have also been affected by the cold weather that has hit the Iberian Peninsula since last January. In winter, this berry can withstand temperatures below 0 °C, but in Spain, an early variety is planted which, in the event of temperatures rising in spring, would cause the production to accumulate. The campaign which started just a few days ago will also be marked by a 12.5% increase in the acreage, which has made it the second most planted berry in the province of Huelva (which is the largest producer of berries in the European Union). However, this growth will trigger another drop in value, which in 2016 had already fallen by 25.8%, to 3.47 Euro per kilo.

Spain has become a world power in the marketing of berries and the majority of markets that import Spanish berries are within the European Union. Germany alone accounts for 31.15% of the total (122,993 tonnes). The concentration of the supply through organizations such as Onubafruit, Fruta de Andalucía, Plus Berries or Freshuelva has improved the sector's capacity to negotiate, as well as the profit margins. In fact, growers are now considering making the leap to the Asian continent. However, they acknowledge that, to make this possible, they need the Public Administration to introduce sales protocols in certain countries where the fruit cannot be sold.

Developing new, longer-lasting varieties, doing away with intermediaries and improving the technology are the main challenges for the sector at present. Producers also strive for an even greater concentration of the supply in order to become more competitive.

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