



Spain: Reduction of acreage devoted to top fruit in Lleida

Producers in Lleida have continued reducing the acreage devoted to apple and pear trees, with 8,203 hectares devoted to top fruit abandoned between 2005 and 2017. As revealed by the latest official data published by the Catalan Council of Agriculture, the productive acreage in the province has dropped from 23,775 hectares to just 15,572 hectares.

Pear trees have been the most affected crop, with a reduction of 4,732 hectares. The total acreage devoted to pears now amounts to 9,254 hectares, when twelve years ago, this figure stood at 13,986 hectares, according to the Council. For apple trees, the drop is estimated at 3,471 productive hectares, from 10,069 to 7,061.

When looking for the reasons for this development, several factors must be taken into account. On the one hand, there was a "boom" of stone fruit cultivation a few years ago, motivated by the good prices paid, which encouraged the production of peaches, nectarines and Paraguayo peaches. On the other, producers of some pear varieties have been affected by some problems in the production process. With the introduction of new regulations, the European Union made the management of tree vigour much more difficult for Blanquilla pears. Therefore, there was a decrease in the production of this variety and a switch to the Conference. Furthermore, apple producers in Lleida face fierce foreign competition. An Afrucat report revealed that about half of the apples consumed in Spain, specifically 44%, come from other countries. In the case of pears, local fruit dominates on the shelves, with a 85.8% share.

Stone fruit acreage has increased by almost 60% in the same period

The reduction of the top fruit acreage has been mostly compensated by an expansion of that devoted to stone fruit. In fact, between 2005 and 2012, the farms producing peaches and nectarines have seen the acreage grow by almost 60%, from 11,493 to 18,264 hectares. This trend has been observed in the entire Ebro Valley and the sector has been suffering from an acute price crisis since the summer of 2014, coinciding with the entry into force of the Russian veto on a number of European products, including fruit.

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