

Spain: Aromatic and medicinal herbs, an alternative in irrigated areas

The Center for Scientific and Technological Research of Extremadura (CICYTEX) is working on a project to diversify the supply of medicinal and aromatic plant crops. The idea is to have high-quality sustainable productions in Extremadura.

Trials are being carried out with various species: oregano, *Thymus zygis*, lavender, lemon verbena, lemon thyme and lemon balm, to which other species of interest for the region will be added in successive campaigns. The objective is to evaluate their agronomic behavior, crop management and real-scale yields. The publication of a cultivation manual for some of the species under study is planned for 2019.

At present, there are some 200 hectares in Extremadura intended for the production of such products.

The project, developed at the Agricultural Research Institute Finca La Orden-Valdesequera (center assigned to CICYTEX), aims to diversify the supply of these crops in Extremadura and promote high-quality productions. They are crops with a growing demand. Some are essential for the extraction of the active ingredients necessary for the preservation of food products in a natural and healthy way. There is also a big demand for basic crops from which to obtain essences for the perfume industry. Lastly, the crops intended for the production of substances for the pharmaceutical and cosmetic industry also stand out.

According to the person responsible for this project, researcher Francisco Vázquez, the climatic and edaphologic conditions of Extremadura make the region competitive for the cultivation of autochthonous species and for the introduction of other species. The field trials at Finca La Orden serve to study the methodology and agronomic problems involved in their cultivation, as well as the productive yields on a real scale and the quality of the crops for condimentary (food) and industrial use.

To develop this work, CICYTEX has access to a Germplasm Bank of Aromatic and Medicinal Plants with more than 600 entries. This genetic material has served as the basis for the selection and later collection of reproductive material in the field, mainly seeds.

Researcher Francisco Vázquez believes that the cultivation of aromatic and medicinal plants can be a good alternative in irrigated



lands. They are crops with profitable and sustainable productions, and more convenient than wild pickings.

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