



British tomato growers ready to meet increased demand following Brexit

Currently, UK growers produce only 20% of the total tomato volume consumed in Britain each year. According to Dr. Philip Morley, technical officer with the British Tomato Growers Association, British tomato growers are very upbeat about the future of the domestic industry and are ready to meet demand through sustainable approaches. The association, which represents more than 95% of tomato growers in the UK, has unveiled a new brand and consumer-orientated website as part of a long-term strategy to raise the profile of British tomatoes among consumers.

Extra demand for British growers following Brexit

"In Britain, we eat around 500,000 tons of fresh tomatoes every year, with consumers spending around £921m annually. UK growers produce around 20% of this total by volume – this goes up to around half during summer, which is peak British tomato season," says Philip. "UK growers also produce around 25% by value, as British tomatoes tend to be premium crops."

Food security has been brought into sharp focus as a result of both Brexit and the coronavirus pandemic. "There's been a move towards shorter supply chains, which helps to provide local jobs and support local communities. Shorter supply chains also help people understand the provenance of their tomatoes, which consumers are increasingly taking an interest in," he says, adding that Brexit also means greater restrictions on overseas growers, making it more difficult to import goods. "Another factor that's set to increase demand on domestically grown tomatoes."

Expansions

Recent expansions show how the British growers are ready to meet demand through sustainable approaches. "The high level of investment





needed to build a glasshouse (approximately £1m per hectare) is a limitation on rapid expansion. So too is the culture of ‘cheap food’ making even the best growers struggle for profitability,” Philip says. “Despite this, British growers are ready to meet the demand and produce superb quality crops all year round. Key to this is sustainable growth and business techniques.”

Examples of this are the use of renewable energy systems, such as solar power, ground-sourced heating, and recycled rainwater. “Then there’s the natural pest and disease control in greenhouse ecosystems, as well as a state-of-the-art computer and sensor systems to maintain the best growing conditions in the most efficient way possible,” Philip adds. “Growers also incorporate business development through high ESG standards, such as enhancing natural environments around farms and providing nearby communities with employment opportunities.”

To share this story broadly, the organization has recently launched a new brand and website, the latest move as part of a three-year strategy to help increase awareness of the British tomato among consumers. Thanet Earth, Flavourfresh, Red Roofs, Glinwell, La Serra, The Green House Growers, R & L Holt – the case studies on how they are incorporating sustainability in their business can be found on the website, with mouth-watering images and information on when and where to buy British tomatoes

The future of the tomato industry

British tomato growers are very upbeat about the future of the domestic industry and many are already either constructing new production facilities or in the late stages of planning for that. “Increasingly innovative growers are investing heavily in next-generation growing technologies continuing to bring a better and deeper understanding of plant biology to produce a superior and healthier product, which they’re proud to call British,” Philip concludes.

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