

FRANCE

Medfel brings the Med together

The first Medfel fruit and vegetable fair focused on the importance of cooperation among Mediterranean countries in order to benefit producers and exporters all over the region

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The first Medfel trade fair took place at the end of April in Perpignan, in the southwest of France, attracting almost 200 exhibitors from Mediterranean countries and some 3,231 French and international buyers.

According to organisers, the fair, billed as "the first international fruit and vegetables fair for the Euro-Mediterranean region", greatly exceeded their expectations.

Alongside the trade fair, lectures and debates took place, addressing topics as diverse as the Union for the Mediterranean, free trade agreements, water issues and the Europêch' European stonefruit forecasts.

The event was inaugurated by Georges Frêche, president of the Languedoc-Roussillon region, in the presence of the Moroccan consul in Montpellier, Abdelfettah El Karidi.

Mr Frêche stressed the need for cooperation between all the countries in the Mediterranean, a theme continued by Mr El Karidi, who said of Moroccan-French relations: "We are not competitors; we complement one other."



Georges Frêche, president of the Languedoc-Roussillon region, cuts the ribbon to open Medfel

Morocco

Morocco enjoyed a commanding presence at Medfel in its role as guest of honour. Dawya Sadani of Maroc Export, which assists the export activities of Moroccan firms and organises participation at trade fairs, stated that the idea of bringing the Mediterranean region

together would be highly beneficial for Moroccan producers. "Moroccan producers already enjoy good access to Europe, but the Union can only make this better," she said.

However, she added that there is still an assumption among many Europeans that Moroccan products must be

Stonefruit forecasts revealed at Europêch'

Attendees at this year's Europêch', the annual announcement of Europe's stonefruit forecasts which took place in conjunction with Medfel, were treated to a far more optimistic outlook than two years ago and a general improvement over last year's figures.

In 2007, unfavourable weather conditions resulted in significant drops in Spain, Italy and France, with Greece the only winner. The following year saw France and Italy once again hampered by poor weather, with Spain's recovery hindered by massive strikes and Greece remaining stable.

This year, the forecasts appeared

to suggest that Europe's growers had finally reached the light at the end of the tunnel. The total production volume of European peaches, nectarines and clingstone peaches was expected to rise from last year's 2.76m tonnes to 2.95m tonnes, according to Europêch' facilitator Eric Hostalnou of the Roussillon region's chamber of agriculture.

Thanks to an absence of any major climatic hazards, Italian and Spanish production volumes were expected to increase by 6 per cent, to reach 1.51m tonnes and 762,959 tonnes respectively, although in Spain much of this increase was to come from nectarines. Greek production was predicted to rise 2 per cent to 900,000 tonnes.

Meanwhile, the forecast volume for French production, despite being down 14 per cent on the 2003-2007 average, showed an expected increase of 16 per cent, to some 326,014 tonnes. However, attendees were warned that the impact of a sudden bout of hail just over a week ago had not been taken into account in the final results.

As for apricots, Greek producers predicted a significant decrease of 30 per cent due to a sudden drop in temperatures during the blooming period, while Spanish and Italian producers forecast little variation. Following a disastrous 2008, volumes of French apricots were expecting a jump of a massive 115 per cent. ■

Union for the Mediterranean

The potential impact on the fruit and vegetable sector of the Union for the Mediterranean, a community of EU and non-EU Mediterranean countries initiated last July by French president Nicolas Sarkozy, was debated in the first Medfel conference session. Increased cooperation between south and east Mediterranean countries (SEMC) and the Mediterranean regions of the EU, including via strategic alliances, could greatly benefit the region as a whole, visitors heard. On the other hand, some are concerned that the benefits of such cooperation would be unevenly distributed.

Jean-Louis Guigou of IPEMED (the institute of economic forecasting for the greater Mediterranean) began the debate by pointing out that the Mediterranean region could comprise 1bn people in the near future, an undeniably attractive market for the fresh produce industry. "As Barack Obama said at the Salon of the Americas," Mr Guigou stated, "Let's stop quarrelling and come together."

Fatima El Hadad-Gauthier of international organisation CIHEAM-IAMM, however, pointed to the fact that the region was not at all homogenous, with economies, as well as labour productivity and income, differing greatly. Nevertheless, she revealed her optimism about the proposal.

"In the north, they say that low labour costs distort competition; in the south, they complain about the subsidies that are handed out in the northern countries," she said. "Small companies also fear a loss of business from the creation of a free trade zone. But these fears obscure the opportunities. We have conducted studies that show that there is great complementarity between the northern and southern countries."

Claude Chéreau, former ambassador of France to the FAO and farming representative on the Union for the Mediterranean project, said that the true results of the union would not be obvious for 25-30 years. "In the meantime," he added, "we need to figure out how to resolve particular problems and improve conditions."

inferior. "All our producers have the necessary certifications, but many people still have a negative view of our products," she said. "Our produce offers extremely high quality; the challenge now is how best to market it."

Azura

Florence Philip of Moroccan exporter Azura said that conditions in the melon-producing region in the south of the country, in Dakhla, were ideal for production of the company's first volumes of Charentais vert melons. "We are producing around 1,500 tonnes," she told Eurofruit Magazine. "France is the main market, since the French are the main consumers of this variety of melon. The season starts at the beginning of March and comes to an end in mid- to late May."

Great strides have been made in Morocco regarding food safety, she added. "For the last 10 years, producers in Morocco have been working hard to improve food security. Plan Maroc Vert is an example of this. On the whole, there has been a great improvement. In April, we gained IFS Logistics certification, so we can guarantee to our customers that the whole process is certified from production to consumption."

Rougeline

Rougeline is a tomato and strawberry producer based in the south of France. Segmentation is one of the company's principal strategies – the company offers



Rougeline's new strawberry-tomato line

more than 20 different tomato varieties and is still introducing new types.

"Last month, we launched a double pack of strawberries and tomatoes called 'Le P'tit repas léger & nature'," said the company's marketing manager Sandrine Brunoro. "These 250g packs are completely natural, with no additives, and they are clearly labelled with all the relevant nutritional information. We have also just launched a pink tomato called Pinkoo, which is Japanese for pink. This is an Asian variety and is very sweet. We've created a three-pack with a cardboard tray and pink packaging covered in Japanese writing."

Pink Lady

Didier Crabos, chairman of Pink Lady Europe, told Eurofruit Magazine that the



Pink Lady Europe chairman Didier Crabos

group never imagined the recognition that the Pink Lady brand would go on to have when it was first created. "It has gone beyond our expectations," he said.

Regarding the recent change to the Pink Lady logo, Mr Crabos commented: "It is not a radical change, just an evolution – to refresh the image and make it a bit more general. But we have held on to the concept of love. Pink Lady is now truly international, so it was a good time to evolve the brand."

Pink Lady's international reach is also coupled with a cross-generational reach. "We have noticed that Pink Lady touches people of all ages," he said. "It is a premium product, but one that is attractive to all, including children. We are always communicating to increase consumption, and our promotions are always very youthful, which attracts young consumers. There are people out there who don't tend to eat apples, but who do eat Pink Lady."

Biodattes Algérie

According to Fayçal Khebizat of Algerian organic date producer Biodattes Algérie, Medfel proved to be a highly successful fair for the company. "We have made lots of new contacts," he told Eurofruit Magazine, "and we met lots of suppliers and potential clients."

The company's dates are produced with no chemicals or pesticides, Mr Khebizat said, and are exported to France. "We are looking to consolidate our position on the French market, as well as exploring new markets. We produce around 300 tonnes of organic dates per year. We concentrate on the quality of our product, in terms of its taste and sizing, not necessarily the quantity."

The microclimate in Algeria – the quality of the water, air and soil – is ideal for the production of natural, top-quality fresh dates, according to Mr Khebizat, and it is their high concentration of natural sugars that stands them apart from those produced in Israel, Tunisia and California, he said. ■