



FAIRS / REPORT MEDFEL.

With around 200 exhibitors and more than 3000 visitors, the first edition of MEDFEL, the "leading Euro-Mediterranean Fruit & Vegetable International Business Trade Fair" held in

REFOCUSING THE MEDITERRANEAN

To recover the ancient role of the Mediterranean as *jardin de l'Europe* by promoting communication, exchange and trade cooperation: this is the avowed mission of MEDFEL, the "Euro-Mediterranean Fruit & Vegetable International Business Trade Fair", held in Perpignan from April 28 to 30. With around 200 exhibitors and more than 3,000 visitors, the first edition of this fair, which is born from the twenty-year experience of the Fruit and Vegetables International Forum Europèch', ended with an overall positive balance, according the encouraging assessments expressed by both the organizers and a large part of participants.

Efficient organization and good contact opportunities, which the exhibition's human scale size and the possibility of B2B meetings set in advance helped make more concrete: these are the main strengths that the operators attending the event pointed out, which balanced the difficulties caused by a still limited participation. On the other hand, it was quite predictable that the fact of being a first edition may lead many professionals into caution, as they preferred to stay apart and watch the exhibition's outcomes rather than make an investment in a new event just two and a half months after Fruit Logistica.

Among the national delegations from different Countries of the Euro-Mediterranean area, particularly large was that of Morocco, guest of honor this year with a dedicated stand of 200 square meters. All main national associations of growers and exporters were attending, as well as a few major companies such as **Agrisouss**,



Above, some of the Italian booths at Medfel 2009, which gathered around 200 exhibitors. Below: Ahmad Monhem, exhibition manager



one of Morocco's biggest exporters of fruit and vegetables, whose **marketing manager Mohamed Soulali** commented: "This is an important event for Morocco, a country that must enhance and improve its fresh produce export, especially in the current hard times. Moreover, Perpignan is the main platform through which we export our products to Europe, so much that even too many goods are being dealt here. This is the reason why we are starting an action to promote the use of motorways of the sea, through an alliance with the shipping company IMTC that will allow us to gradually replace land transport with sea transport."

This intention is confirmed by **Hicham Fahmi, senior manager of IMTC group**: "Our line Agadir-Port



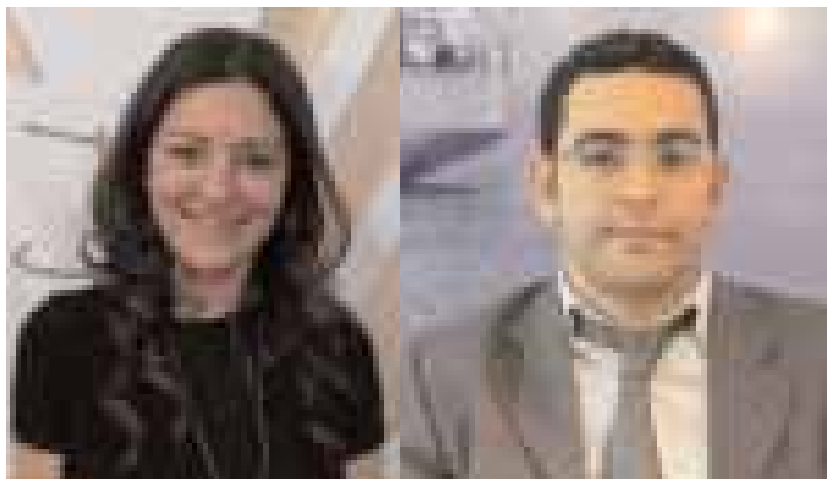
Perpignan from April 28 to 30, ended with an overall positive balance, according the encouraging assessments expressed by both the organizers and a large part of participants. Efficient organization and good contact opportuni-

Vendres aims to be a service for the export of Moroccan products to southern France; for northern Europe we have recently launched a new weekly connection with Dunkirk, which aims to divert part of Rotterdam's traffic to Dunkirk." With regard to the fair, Fahmi appreciated the good quality of the organization, especially with regard to the staff's expertise and the possibility of targeted meetings. However, he expressed some doubts about the timing of the event.

Positive ratings also from **Ali Warit, marketing manager of MFB (Moroc Fruit Board)**, association of Moroccan growers and exporters: "The location is good, as about 85% of vegetables and tomatoes that are grown in Morocco, from Agadir arrive by road to Perpignan to be then distributed in France and in the rest of Europe." Although trade relations between France and Morocco have already started for some time, therefore, there is still room for development. "We aim to revitalize Moroccan products on the French and European market in a more organized way, thus improving the distribution chain from the fields down to retailers" concluded Warit.

The attendance of Italian companies was quite significant as well. All of them - around twenty - declared themselves satisfied with the exhibition. "It is a small fair, but not bad as the first edition. It reminds me the old MACFRUT" said **Lamberto Giovanardi, marketing manager of Orogel Fresco**. Referring to the trade opportunities offered by the fair, he added: "It is not easy for Italians to work in France. For our company too, it is a niche market, our export volumes are very low."

Also the delegates of the three Piedmont producers' organizations that



From the top: Alessandra Sacchetto, marketing manager of Asprofrut (left); Hicham Fahmi, senior manager of IMTC Group (right); Carlo Manzo, director of Ortofrut Italia; Anna Bosio of Lagnasco Group.



attended under Assortofrutta brand - Asprofrut, Lagnasco Group and Ortofrut Italia - are of the same opinion. "We came here hoping to strengthen our presence in France," said **Carlo Manzo, director of Ortofrut Italia**, an association made up of 12 cooperatives and about ten individual businesses, with an annual turnover of 27 million euros. "France, however, is not a great market for us, our main outlet markets are Germany, the United Kingdom, Canada (for kiwifruits), the United States, Russia, Australia. Here it is hard to sell because French consumers give priority to domestic products. Nevertheless, we managed to have some business contact with development possibilities," he added.

Alessandra Sacchetto, marketing manager at Asprofrut's fresh produce office, was rather satisfied: "The small size of this exhibition proved to be a positive factor: the general setting is good, and the fair is specialized, so meetings with new buyers are possible more thoroughly than in a big fair such as Fruit Logistica, where now there are so many exhibitors that the meeting with new customers has become difficult." According to **Anna Bosio of Lagnasco**



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From the left: Mohamed Soulali, marketing manager of Agrisouss (Morocco); Lamberto Giovanardi, marketing manager of Orogel Fresco (Italy); Vito Carlo Sportelli of Jonica Bio (Italy). Below, a view of the Southern-French pavillion

Group as well, "contacts have been few but good: visitors asked a lot of questions that were mainly aimed at purchasing: this makes us hope that these contacts can have a concrete development even after the fair is ended."

According to **Vito Carlo Sportelli of Jonica Bio**, an organic producers' organization born in 2004 with headquarters in Ginosa (Apulia), the fair has been better than expectations. "With a turnover of 3.5 mln euros, Jonica Bio tries to encourage growers to convert from conventional to organic, by seeking new markets for exports and demonstrating that organic is a path that can lead to good results" Sportelli said. "We already export 75% of our products, especially to German and Scandinavian retailers. We came to Perpignan to check which possibilities are offered by the French market, and we managed to make some interesting contacts: fortunately the organic sector is still having good growth potential, thus reflecting the need to specialize in order to avoid being crushed by competition" he added.



As regards the participation of local players, finally, more than fifty companies based in the Languedoc-Roussillon region were gathered in the two regional pavillions Sud de France and Translog Sud de France-Saint Charles Export. In general they declared themselves satisfied with the exhibition's development, as confirmed by **Cyril Gorne, representa-**

tive of Saint-Charles Export, an association for exports' promotion that gathers nearly 3000 players of the fresh produce supply chain in Languedoc-Roussillon: "Good contacts and excellent services, we are really satisfied." The only flaw was the scarce participation of Spanish companies, as alleged by some delegates, including **Stéphane Famery,**



difficulties caused by a still limited participation. Among the national delegations from Euro-Mediterranean Countries, particularly large was that of Morocco, guest of honor this year with a dedicated stand of 200 sqm

marketing manager of Transalliance Group. Other Countries' presence was quite limited as well, although a big part of the southern Mediterranean area was covered, including Tunisia, Algeria and Lebanon.

In the wake of the Union for the Mediterranean project launched by French President Sarkozy - which was the theme of one of the three plenary conferences held during the fair - Perpignan exhibition aims to strengthen trade relations between the the Mediterranean area's countries, placing the Languedoc-Roussillon region at the core of this process, as underlined by **the President of the region George Frêche**: "Our region is geographically and strategically located at the crossroads of the Mediterranean Basin, and we have the tools to support it to face the challenges of global competition. There is a clear complementarity between the various agricultural crops in the area, particularly as far as fruit and vegetables are concerned. This may allow to provide worldwide consumers with an excellent variety of fruit and vegetables over much longer seasons than at present, without our regional players being sacrificed for this reason."

Growth prospects of this first Euro-Mediterranean exhibition look good, then, as says smiling **Chantal Pasat, Head for the Agri-food sector of Export Sud de France**, the institution that promoted the event. "We wanted to create a friendly and warm environment, that embodies all typical characteristics of the South. I think we succeeded. We must not forget that the Mediterranean is - first of all - a state of mind."

by Susanna Beltrame, GMJ staff reporting from Perpignan



French strawberries on display at the fair. Below, the booth of the Moroccan logistics company IMTC.

