

AUSTRIA

Austria strives for 30% organic cultivation

Austria is still a European leader when it comes to organic cultivation. The overarching Austrian organic organization has now set itself a new goal: they want a 30% increase of the organic share of the complete horticultural area by 2025, according to website bio-markt.info.

At the BioFach, it was announced by Bio Austria that the long-time objective of 20% had already been reached by the country. According to the association's figures, organic production occurred at 571,585 hectares in Austria in the previous year. That means a share of 22% of the complete horticultural area. "Nowadays, production according to organic guidelines occurs on more than every fifth hectare in Austria. The increase of the organic horticultural area amounted to 26,500 hectares in the past year. That is about the size of Malta, or approximately 38,000 football fields," says Bio Austria chairman Gertraud Grabmann.

That's why it's now time to strive for a new milestone: "We, and the politicians, should strive for an organic share of 30% of the total horticultural area as a new-stage objective for the year 2025," according to Gertraud. The potential of organic horticulture is far from exhausted in Austria.



FRANCE

New pack for new potatoes

A new freshness bag for its new potatoes, set to hit shelves in May by French marketer Prince de Bretagne is launching.

Brittany marketer Prince de Bretagne has revealed plans to introduce the same format for its new potatoes, following last year's successful launch of a 1kg bag for early potatoes.

Since the 2016 season, Prince de Bretagne has been offering its early Primabreizh potatoes in a 1kg freshness bag, and the company's new potatoes, available from May until mid-August, are set to receive the same treatment.

The company describes the bag as "small" and "practical", capable of boosting the shelf-life of early potatoes and slowing their greening, while reducing household waste.

The packs all bear the Prince de Bretagne logo and the regional identity of the product, in addition to culinary and nutritional information.

GERMANY

Rewe trials laser labelling system

German food retailer Rewe Group has continued its quest to trim unnecessary packaging by trialling a new system of laser labelling.

The pilot scheme will see it adopt the system which involves laser-printing product information directly on to the outside of a product for organic fresh fruit and vegetables, starting with avocados and sweet potatoes sold through both its Rewe supermarket and Penny discount chains.

The move follows a recent announcement that Penny will no longer sell bananas in plastic bags. Instead, those bananas that need to be accompanied by product information or marketing messages will be merchandised with a more minimal band wrapped around them.

Starting in northern Germany, Penny has begun to remove the superfluous packaging from all of its stores (around 2,150) and expects to complete the process by the end of March 2017.

The retailer has also estimated that the amount of plastic per year saved as a result would be enough to cover 900 football pitches.

Elsewhere, Swedish supermarket chain ICA has rolled out its own trial of laser labelling in partnership with Dutch supplier Nature & More.



The scheme, which similarly involves avocados and sweet potatoes, is part of a concerted effort by the retailer to reduce the amount of packaging and labelling it uses to sell its fresh produce.

Peter Hagg, ICA's senior manager for fruit and vegetables, told *The Guardian*: "It's a new technique, and we are searching for a smarter way of branding our products due to the fact that we think we have too much unnecessary plastic material or packaging material on our products."

MOROCCO

Morocco faces surfeit of citrus

Citrus production in Morocco has exceeded its packing capacity, with the country's pack houses able to handle only one-third of national production.

The current citrus season in Morocco has experienced a rise in production that exceeds the capacity of the country's packing stations, according to a report from Agri Maroc.

In partnership with the Moroccan Citrus Inter professional Federation (Morocco Citrus), the Moroccan Association of Citrus Packers (ASCAM) has decided to carry out an investigation into the packing sector to identify areas that require restructuring and upgrading.

The results for Morocco's Beni Mellal-Khénifra region were presented last month at the general assembly of the association, with the region recording sig-



nificant growth in citrus production to nearly 420,000 tonnes this year.

The meeting was attended by representatives of ASCAM and major farmers from the Beni Mellal-Khénifra region, as well as the Autonomous Establishment for the Control and Coordination of Exports (EACCE), the Regional Directorates of Agriculture (DRA) and the Agency for Agricultural Development (ADA).

Khalid Bounajma, president of ASCAM, said that Moroccan citrus producers had for years sold all the fruit on their trees prior to harvesting. Now, however, the country faces overproduction, with the country's 53 pack houses able to handle a maximum of 850,000 tonnes, just one-third of national production.

NETHERLAND

Apple pesticide test extended to new varieties

In order to improve detection of pesticide's application, Dutch gene activity analyst NSure has expanded its testing equipment for apples to a wider range of common varieties.

The existing FreshNSure Apple test, which monitors the fruit's gene activity, has been extended to a wider range of common varieties and can now be used for Golden Delicious and Pink Lady, as well as Gala, Red Delicious, Fuji, Granny Smith, Elstar and Jonagold.

The FreshNSure Apple test enables suppliers to determine whether a batch of apples has been treated with 1-MCP, a chemical that improves storability and shelf life. The pesticide leaves no residue after treatment but the FreshNSure test demonstrates whether or not 1-MCP has been applied based on the activity of a specific set of genes.

As well as validating the FreshNSure test for new varieties, NSure also aims to improve the test specifications. The company is currently investigating whether it is possible to advance the moment at which the chemical's application can be detected from one month to three months after the apples have been stored.



NEW ZEALAND

New Zealand apples arrives late

This season, a record harvest is expected in New Zealand. Estimates are currently at 21,600,000 TCE (18-kilogram trays), 11 % higher than last year," says Tony Fissette from Enzafruit. "A very large harvest is headed our way."

The first apples from New Zealand arrived in Europe later than expected, due to bad weather. "We had a lot of rain during the picking period, but this has had no influence on production and harvest estimates so far.

During the first week of April, Enzafruit started with Cox, and the first Smitten arrived this week. "Fewer Cox apples will be sent to Europe in total this year. We have a one-month programme with Smitten, in April. Royal Gala will start arriving in the third week of April. The first Jazz apples for the European market will arrive early May. That's also when we finish the European season, so the New Zealand season closely connects to that. In Europe, a similar volume of Jazz is expected as last year, the surplus will go to Asia and the UK."

It is expected that seven million packages of Royal Gala from New Zealand will be exported, which is 5% more than last season. Jazz and Pink Lady will have 16 % more volume destined for export. Envy exports will increase by 32 %. A Braeburn export increase of 6% is expected and an



increase of 26 % of Queen from New Zealand. It is expected that the same amount of Royal Gala will be sent to Europe as last year. This strain will be sent to Asia and the Middle East more. For Envy, the main destinations are Asia, the US and the Middle East.

Not much of this strain will be sent to Europe. The New Zealand Queen is also entirely for other markets such as the Middle East and the US. Fuji mostly has Asia as a destination as well.

NORTH AMERICA

Pearl onions are gaining momentum in North America

The current supply of pearl onions is "unlimited at this point. It's also consistent and the quality is premium. Pearl onions are gaining momentum in the

West, but pearl onions are also very popular in Europe and some parts of Asia. "Italy, Germany, The Netherlands and India are all places that love including pearl onions in their cuisine," says Andrea Dubak with Thomas Fresh. In India, you'll see them in sweet relishes and in Germany many prefer to pickle them. They're available year-round; Thomas Fresh is currently sourcing them fresh from Canada. "Whenever you need them, we are happy to order them for you," she said.

"A cross-cultural favorite for dishes, especially at this time of year, these tiny sweet jewels have multiple applications," shared Dubak. "We're exposed to so many recipes, and visuals in the media. It's easier than ever to try something new in the kitchen and to buy high quality ingredients," she added. "There's also a larger focus on eating healthy in our society, which opens the doors to exploring new fruits and vegetables like pearl onions. Pearl onions are interesting because they are so small compared to many other onion varieties and they pack a unique flavor profile."

Thomas Fresh recently introduced new packaging for its premium white and red variety pearl onions. The packaging reflects the company's goal to provide consumers with the best possible end product. "It has a breathable mesh to preserve freshness." Bags are easily identifiable: the reds feature the exact color taken from the onion itself, as does the white onion packaging. "The red and white pearl onion design has our signature label on the top the bag.



MICHIGAN

New Asparagus packaging for mid-May retail season

Todd Greiner Farms Packing, LLC., a Michigan asparagus grower/packer/shipper, today revealed a new packaging design in preparation for the mid-May season launch. The 12 oz, "microwave in the bag," packaging was designed to attract impulse purchases by consumers looking for quick and easy meal ideas in the produce department.

"We believe the new packaging optimizes freshness, taste and convenience, and will be a strong selling point for our retail partners," said Todd Greiner, CEO/President of Todd Greiner Farms. "Today's busy consumer loves fresh healthy food, and now it will only take two minutes in a microwave for consumers to enjoy our 'farm-fresh' asparagus."

Todd Greiner Farms' new asparagus packaging was designed to capitalize on broader consumer demand for meals and snacks that are convenient, fresh and healthy. In research prepared for Michigan Asparagus, 29% of shoppers surveyed stated they are purchasing more asparagus compared to last year. In fact, consumer consumption now exceeds 1.5 pounds per consumer, per year. National retailers substantiated these data trends in a separate survey, showing growth in both asparagus sales and profit during the past three years. Moreover, the move

towards "value added" products such as microwaveable packaging not only increases returns to the grower, but adds dollars in category sales for retail partners.

Greiner closed, "Innovation is critical to the success of not only our operation, but the growth of the category and consumer consumption. We understand that our responsibility is to help the retailers bring value-added solutions that can address the needs of everyone."

PERU

Peru floods cause US\$645m in Agri Losses

The floods affecting Peru have caused losses of at least US\$645m in the agriculture and livestock sectors according to a statement from the National Convention of Peruvian Agriculture (Conveagro).

The association said in a statement that heavy rains and flooding had destroyed around 92,000ha of banana, sugar cane and rice crops, among other products, mainly in the north of the country.

Some 6,000km of roads have been damaged or destroyed by the rains that began in December, caused by the greater warming of the Pacific off the coast of Peru and Ecuador, known as El Niño Costero.

"Most of those affected are small producers, many of whom require their loans to be rescheduled with zero-rate loans or through mechanisms to purchase debt,"

said Conveagro's president Héctor Carrasco.

The Peruvian Council of Ministers has approved an Emergency Decree that will allow the implementation of a US\$42m programme developed by the agriculture ministry to help affected growers.

This includes the immediate allocation of US\$29m to repair damaged infrastructure such as canals and reservoirs and a payment of US\$307 per hectare of damaged production up to a maximum US\$1,231 per hectare.

In addition, there will be funds to restore plantations of bananas, lemons, mangos and other fruit trees directly affected by the floods.

SPAIN

Iceberg lettuce prices below production costs

The product is being exported to practically all of Europe and the Arab countries; however, the local production in Germany, Poland, Serbia, etc. will arrive soon and then Spanish lettuce will no longer have a place in the international market. "Normally about 80% of the lettuce is exported," says García, although he has not been able to provide the total production figure because the campaign has yet to finish.

The campaign is in its final stretch and Spain still has a lot of production, which is why prices have fallen to 3 Euro per box, compared to the 5 Euro paid last year. "There are companies that, depending on their situation and needs, are selling for even lower prices," states Jerónimo García, Manager of Marsol Fruits Spain.

This situation is due to the expansion of the acreage after the good results obtained in the previous campaign, as well as by the good weather conditions in recent weeks, which have caused some overproduction.

New packaging solution to sell the entire production

"With the launch of this packaging format, we have managed to market the product to other audiences," states Arturo Fernández, of Cortijo las Palomas.



This is a way to prevent the waste of lemons that fail to meet the calibre standards demanded by stores. "We talked with traders in the Nordic countries, our main customers, and they told us that packaging them individually would make their distribution easier," explains Fernández.

So far, the acceptance has been very good. "Although the use of this packaging format entails an increase in the final price of 15%, customers appreciate the presentation and care," affirm representatives of Cortijo Las Palomas. It is worth noting that the lemons packed in these containers are mainly those of extra quality.

One of the advantages of this new presentation is that "we have managed to open new markets," points out Fernández, as the product was initially intended for hospitality and will now be distributed in several supermarket chains. "In the long run, it will not change our profits, but it is opening market windows that can always come in handy at times when there isn't enough production," affirms one of the managers of Cortijo Las Palomas. Nevertheless, they continue to work with the hospitality industry and aim to keep their clients in this sector.

SWITZERLAND

Significantly more organic farms

Swiss organic farming continues to grow. 386 companies signed up for Bio Suisse last year. According to the leading Swiss organic association, which awards the "Knospe" quality label, this has not been the case since the 90s.

As a result, 6,144 producers now act according to the guidelines of Bio Suisse. These farms cultivate some 140,000 hectares of land - 13.4 % of the total agricultural area. The wine-growing industry also received a strong boost: 26 winegrowers are hoping for the "Knospe". They would increase the vine area by a third in one fell swoop, explained the association, which has united 90 % of the federal organic farmers under its umbrella.

An increase was also recorded in the sales of organic food products. According to Bio Suisse the sales increased by 7.8% to 2.505 billion francs reaching a market share of 8.4%. Half of all consumers in Switzerland buy organic products either daily or multiple times per week. This comes to a total of 299 Swiss francs per head (2015: 280 Swiss francs). Thus Switzerland remains the world champion in organic food consumption.

According to the association, fresh products continue to be the most important product range, with sales of 1.25 billion Swiss francs. The most popular organic product remains the egg, followed by vegetables and fresh bread. The market share for these three products is over 20 %, however sales for all product groups have recently grown.

UK

Global Plant Genetics ties up blueberry deal

Global Plant Genetics, a UK-based company that provides intellectual property management and technical support for a range of protected berry and asparagus varieties, has reportedly won a major contract to develop the international market for blueberries belonging to Oregon Blueberry Farms and Nursery in the US.

According to a news report posted on Spanish trade website Fruit Today, Oregon Blueberry Farms and Nursery has appointed Global Plant Genetics to

manage its blueberry genetics around the world.

The group has been breeding blueberries for 16 years and now, with Global Plant Genetics' help, is apparently ready to introduce two high-chill varieties, Megasblue and Titanium, to growers outside the US.

"There will be more exciting advanced selections coming through the pipeline shortly," commented Bob Gabriel, owner of Oregon Blueberry Farms and Nursery.

Rupert Hargreaves of Global Plant Genetics commented: "This is an exciting development in the blueberry world. We have a renowned international presence in the management of intellectual property with a strong focus on our blueberry portfolio."

He added: "The quality of the plant breeding, the commitment of the team at Oregon Blueberry Farms and Nursery, as well as their desire to internationalize their blueberry genetics makes this a perfect combination for our two companies."

The Global Berry Congress, which took place in Rotterdam on 27-29 March, heard that commercial production of highbush blueberries worldwide is expected to reach 904,000 tonnes by 2021.

Global planted area for highbush blueberries is now in excess of 135,00ha, according to the International Blueberry Organization, more than double what it was in 2008. ♦

