



EU solar greenhouses, a production system that guarantees social sustainability

--Solar greenhouses in Southern Europe, concentrated on the coast of Almeria and Granada, bring together the efforts of 14,000 entrepreneurial families and generate cohesive economic activity, which encourages entrepreneurship, cooperation, equality and a commitment to preserving natural resources and protecting the environment.

-- Fair salaries, the social conscience of farmers, the work for the integration of immigrants, the strong women representation at all levels and a range of socially responsible initiatives speak of a sustainable and responsible model.

Brussels, Belgium (30.11.2020) – Most of the fruit and vegetable production under solar greenhouses in south-eastern Spain comes from the 14,000 small, family-run businesses, averaging an ownership of 2,3 hectares of land, that drive the economy in the Spanish regions of Almería and the coast of Granada. As a result, from a social point of view, the region is developing a model of family agriculture with small farms and low land concentration that increases income and welfare, favouring cohesion and reducing inequality. Also a characteristic of this social economy is the fact that the business environment chosen by this multitude of owners is based on models of concentration and collaboration, either through cooperatives, which represent 62% of the income generated by production and sales in the region, or through auctions, also known locally as "alhóndigas".

Cooperatives and Auctions

A cooperative, as defined by the International Cooperative Alliance is “an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically-controlled enterprise”. Hence, a majority of the solar greenhouse farmers in Almería and the coast of Granada participate of a fair system that takes into account their joint interests and that works towards the benefit of all. The "alhóndigas" or auctions group the production of independent farmers, guaranteeing free competition and providing direct access to markets under optimal conditions, improving as a result their positioning within the supply chain. Both the “alhóndiga” and the cooperative systems provide producers with access to financing, technical advice and the incorporation of new technologies.

An Important Job machine for Andalusia

The solar greenhouses in this part of Southern Europe generate a total of 110,000 jobs, of which 78,000 correspond to tasks linked to production, 24,000 to handling and manufacturing and the remaining 8,000 to auxiliary agricultural enterprises (agricultural supplies of all kinds, technological development, transport, etc.). The local roots of all participants in this economic habitat, as well as their present and future dependence on the agricultural well-being of the region, make environmentally sustainable production methods a shared and fundamental priority for them.

“We strive every day to become our best version and to continue developing a business environment that is fair to its participants and a positive social influence,” said Juan Antonio González, president at APROA. “We are very proud of what we have achieved so far in terms social sustainability, women rights, immigrant integration, workforce safety or earnings distribution. Even though there is still work to do, we are confident that our business environment will remain at the top of the agricultural sector worldwide”.

Integration of immigrants

Almeria and Granada’s solar greenhouse agriculture is also an example of immigrant reception and of their integration in the labour market. Foreign employees of over 140 different nationalities represent 65% of the sector’s total number of workers, doubling Spain’s average. Therefore, the social conscience of the local producers, who frequently employ the same people for years, translates into legal employment for an average of 32,000 immigrants, with picks of close to 60,000. Wages and working conditions comply with all the requirements established by Spanish and European legislation and are the same for all workers regardless of their nationality.

Gender equality

The integration of women into the sector's labour market is also on a positive curve, with 30% of women represented on farms, 70% in marketing companies and 30% in technical advisory positions where higher education is required.

Social responsibility

The fruit and vegetables solar greenhouses in Almeria and the coast of Granada comply with European standards of good labour practices (control and risk reduction). To guarantee these results, the producers have the technical and methodological advice of numerous consultants on labour and social responsibility issues and are audited by independent companies that ensure strict compliance with the legislation. There are also numerous initiatives to promote healthy eating habits in schools and donations to food banks, which complement the leadership and commitment of this agricultural model of solar greenhouses with the development of social responsibility.

About CuTE SOLAR:

The EU financed CuTE-SOLAR is a promotion program that brings together a consortium made up of the Association of Producer Organizations of Fruit and Vegetables of Andalusia (APROA-Spain), the Spanish Fruit and Vegetables Interbranch Association (HORTIESPAÑA) and FruitVegetablesEUROPE (EUCOFEL) The campaign aims to raise awareness of the specific characteristics of agricultural production methods in the EU solar greenhouses, especially in key areas such as sustainability and respect for the environment and people, and the safety, quality and traceability of crops. Actions will be conducted in three EU countries (Belgium, Germany and Spain) from 2020 to 2022.

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