

## The fruit and vegetables from European solar greenhouses meet the highest quality standards and are certified several times a year

Several labels guarantee the quality and safety of fruit and vegetables, while providing an ethical dimension for sustainable agriculture

Each year, the Spanish solar greenhouses in Almeria and Granada export some 4.5 million tonnes of fruit and vegetables, three quarters of which to the countries of the European Union and their 500 million consumers. But before reaching the supermarket shelves, these quality fruits and vegetables undergo a battery of strict controls. The more than 14,000 family farms in solar greenhouses on the southern coast of Spain are among the largest suppliers in Europe and are subject to a number of checks each season to ensure the traceability and quality of the products at every stage of production, as well as sustainability and good working conditions for the staff. This minimises risks and ensures that the products reach the consumer in optimum condition.

Food safety is one of the main concerns of consumers. In the event of a health threat, it is crucial to determine the origin of consignments so that the necessary measures can be taken. Because when the origin is unknown, the whole functioning of the internal food market is put at risk. Since they export most of their production, all the fruit and vegetable companies in Almeria and Granada have adopted a traceability system. The labels on the boxes carry a code that indicates the farm of origin.

In addition, the quality standards applied in Spanish solar greenhouses are higher than the legal limits imposed by the European Union. To ensure that these standards are met, the companies have to carry out a large number of checks on samples of the soil, plants, fruit, etc. For these reasons, the coastline of Almeria and Granada is home to the highest concentration of laboratories specialising in agricultural analysis in Europe, which check whether products comply with food quality and safety standards.

### Supermarkets in turn demand stringent controls

One of the most common agricultural certification protocols in the world is **GlobalGAP IFA**, for which GAP stands for Good Agricultural Practice. It is a worldwide certification and quality assurance system for agriculture. Its aim is to improve food safety, promote sustainable production methods, optimise water consumption, use chemicals in a sustainable manner, manage and profit from crops in harmony with their environment in an integrated manner and take into account the welfare of workers and animals. Because of its comprehensiveness and effectiveness, this standard is in demand by supermarket chains such as Aldi, Lidl, Carrefour and Spar.

**GlobalGAP GRASP (Global Risk Assessment on Social Practice)** is a risk assessment of the social practices of agricultural enterprises, with a special focus on the health, safety and welfare of workers. Producers must prove that they comply with national and international labour legislation.

**The QS system** aims to secure the entire production process of fresh food, such as meat, sausages, fruit, vegetables, and potatoes, from origin through processors to buyers. Supermarkets such as Aldi and Lidl are adopting this standard for their product selection.

**Brand Reputation Compliance (BRCGS)** is considered one of the international standards for the qualification of suppliers of products and brands in large supermarkets. It guarantees the food safety of products regarding the processes of preparation, processing or packaging of food, avoiding the risk of pollution.

**International Food Standard (IFS)** is a standard created by the large German, French, and Italian retail chains to control companies that produce food or pack it in bulk. It examines the safety and quality of processed products and ensures that certified companies provide products or services that meet customer specifications and strive to continuously improve their processes.

**LEAF (Linking Environment and Farming) Mark** is a British standard designed to give consumers confidence in the care taken in the production of food and other products. LEAF-labelled products are grown by companies that strive to continually improve their farming practices and protect the environment for the benefit of themselves, consumers, nature and the countryside.

#### **Growing demand for organic products**

Part of the land in the regions of Almeria and Granada is used for organic farming, which is experiencing a continuous growth in demand. To distinguish the products, all packaging must bear the EU logo, which indicates the limited use of chemical pesticides, the absence of genetically modified organisms and the careful use of natural resources.

The best known logo in Europe is the EU Biolabel, but Biogarantie is also widely used in Belgium. Companies that respect organic farming use it to show that they favour sustainable packaging, environmentally responsible transport, and fair trade in the production of their organic products.

---

#### **What is a solar greenhouse?**

A solar greenhouse is a closed structure covered with a plastic film through which the sun's rays shine, giving the plants the light they need to maintain the right temperature for their development during the winter months so that they can carry out photosynthesis. In the process, the plants produce nutrients from the CO<sub>2</sub> they absorb from the air and release enormous amounts of oxygen into the atmosphere. Solar greenhouses are very different from the production methods used in other greenhouses, which use fossil fuel-based heating and lighting systems that consume up to 30% more energy and are therefore harmful to the environment.

#### **About CuteSolar**

CuteSolar is a promotion programme funded by the European Union (EU) and supported by a consortium of Andalusian fruit and vegetable growers' associations (APROA), the Spanish inter-branch fruit and vegetable association (HORTIESPAÑA) and the European fruit and vegetable

trade association FruitVegetablesEUROPE (EUCOFEL). The aim of the information and promotion campaign, which will run until 2022, is to inform consumers about the sustainable and environmentally friendly production and cultivation methods of EU fruit and vegetables, the high standards of greenhouse technology and the quality of fruit and vegetables from southern Spain.

The programme, with a total investment of €1.95 million, is co-financed by the proposing organisations and the European Union, will run for three years (2020-2022) and will be implemented in Spain, Germany and Belgium.

#### Disclaimer

The content of this promotional campaign reflects the views only of the author and is the sole responsibility of the author. The European Commission and the European Research Executive Agency (REA) do not accept any responsibility for any re-use of the information contained therein.

#### Contact:

Sam Jaspers  
+32 499 28 34 00