

PRESS RELEASE

Spanish solar greenhouses guarantee food sovereignty in Europe

Worrying rise in fruit and vegetable imports from third countries

To ensure Europe's food independence, it is essential to promote and facilitate sustainable production methods. The pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine have proven this once again. For Belgium and the rest of the European Union, the solar greenhouses of southern Spain are an important source of quality European fruit and vegetables. With the sun as the only source of energy, they are highly sustainable and independent of foreign energy suppliers. They guarantee a year-round food supply for 500 million Europeans, unaffected by global crises and geopolitical turmoil. However, Spanish farmers are increasingly concerned about Europe's growing food dependency.

The sunny regions of Almeria and Granada, known as the vegetable orchard of Europe, produced some 4 million tonnes of fruit and vegetables last year, even during the coldest winter months. 75% of this was exported to other European countries, mainly to Germany (37%), France (19%), the UK (13%) and the Netherlands (10%). A quick count shows that a third of the vegetables consumed by Europeans in winter came from solar greenhouses in south-eastern Spain, the EU's leading supplier.

Paradoxically, the import of fruit and vegetables from third countries has been increasing every year by more than 5% for the past 7 years, from 1.2 million tonnes in 2015 to 1.8 million tonnes last year. At the same time, European production has fallen by a similar amount. This food dependency is becoming a concern for certain vegetables, such as tomatoes. Although 3 out of 4 Belgians say they prefer fruit and vegetables grown in Europe, imports of Spanish tomatoes have fallen by 540,000 tonnes since 2015, with imports from Morocco and Turkey rising by 234,000 tonnes over the same period.

Despite this decline, half of European consumers have a positive image of fruit and vegetables grown in solar greenhouses, as shown by a European survey conducted by the Cute Solar programme. They believe they are safer, healthier, and more environmentally friendly. The results of this European study confirm the importance of Iberian solar greenhouses and the efforts that need to be made to guarantee European food independence.

"Recent geopolitical events have shown the importance of preserving production models that promote ecological, economic and social sustainability. Only by remaining faithful to these models can the European Union guarantee satisfactory food independence, as today too many products intended for food consumption are still imported from countries outside the European Union", acknowledges the Cute Solar consortium. "The ability of Spanish solar greenhouses to produce fresh fruit and vegetables all year round is a fundamental element for the preservation and self-sufficiency of European food. We are also seeing an increase in consumer demand for safe, quality, and sustainable food. These are all needs with which solar greenhouses are perfectly aligned with.

Figure 1: Evolution of Belgian imports of fruit and vegetables grown in solar greenhouses according to origin.

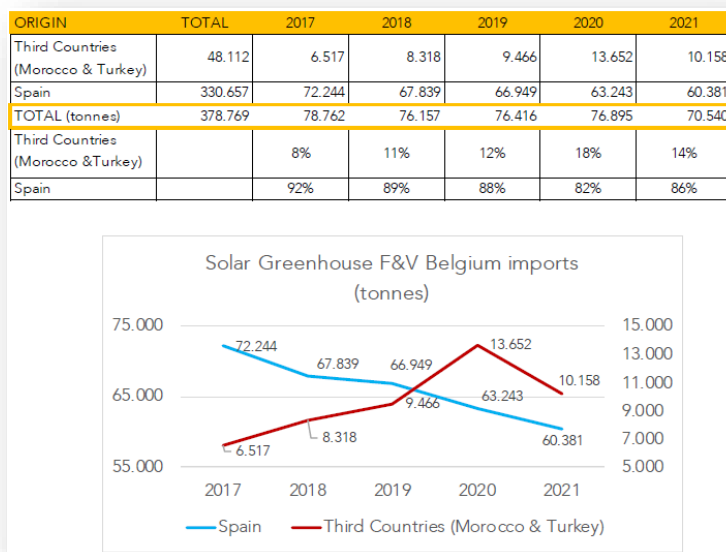


Figure 2: Evolution of European imports of solar-grown fruit and vegetables by origin.

ORIGIN	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Third Countries	1.258.259	1.304.906	1.426.361	1.567.700	1.586.186	1.687.889	1.807.283
EU	6.347.357	6.406.772	6.404.851	6.566.259	6.662.507	6.690.762	6.551.712
TOTAL (tonnes)	7.605.616	7.711.678	7.831.211	8.133.960	8.248.692	8.378.651	8.358.995
Third Countries (%)	17%	17%	18%	19%	19%	20%	22%
EU (%)	83%	83%	82%	81%	81%	80%	78%

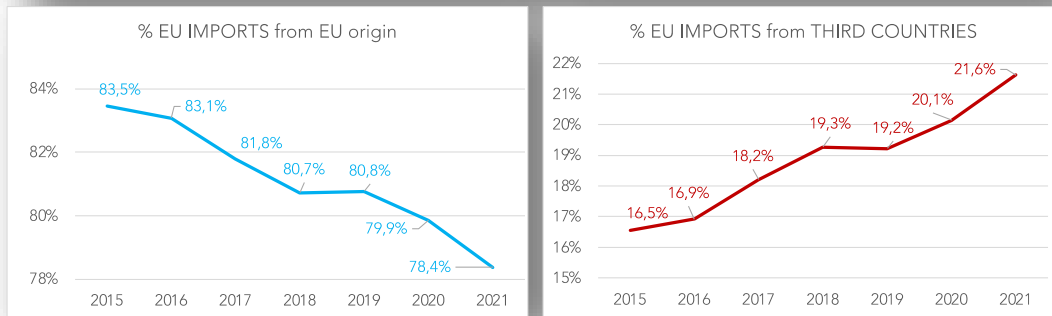
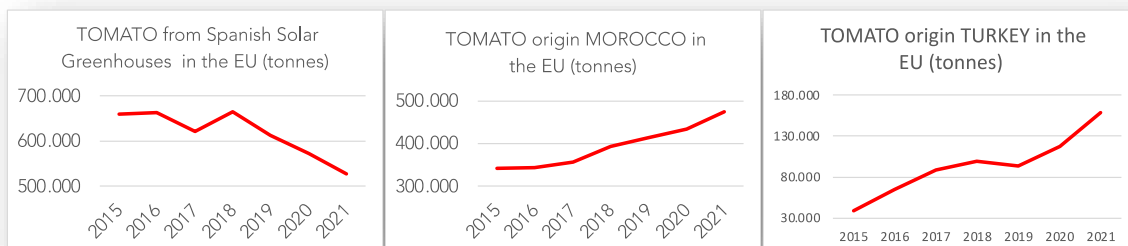


Figure 3: Evolution of tomato volumes from Spanish greenhouses on the European market compared to tomatoes of Moroccan and Turkish origin.



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 CO2 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.

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What is NOT a solar greenhouse?

A greenhouse with solar panels that convert light energy into electrical energy that can then be used to artificially heat or illuminate crops.

About Cute Solar

Cute Solar 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 Assembly of European Fruit and Vegetable Growing Regions (AREFLH). The aim of the information and promotion campaign is to inform consumers about the sustainable and environmentally friendly production methods, the high standards of greenhouse technology and the quality of European fruit and vegetables.

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

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