

PRESS RELEASE

Solar greenhouses in South of Europe prepare for new fruit and vegetables season

During the summer months, the activities in the Southern Spanish solar greenhouses are temporarily reduced and the greenhouses are prepared for the new season. The high temperatures in July and August hinder the development of plants and make it difficult for workers to continue working in the solar greenhouses. Therefore, only the cooler hours of the day are used to improve and check the growing systems in the greenhouses to ensure the best growing conditions for the fruit and vegetable plants in the new season. While the cultivation systems are checked and prepared, the seeds of the new crops are sown in the nurseries. After germination, the seedlings are hardened off before being transplanted into the solar greenhouses.

Although we are used to the 35,000 hectares of solar greenhouses in the provinces of Almeria and Granada being full of fruit and vegetables, they look completely different during summer. Due to the high temperatures in July and August, the solar greenhouses take a break from their hectic activities and the interior spaces are now completely empty. People and crops disappear, the earth rests and recovers and the installations are prepared for the new season.

Preparing the solar greenhouses for the new season is no easy task. It requires careful organisation to ensure that the plants yield the best possible harvest and that the market is not disturbed. For instance, plant residues are removed or incorporated into the soil and the soil is disinfected by means of solarization. In addition, the cultivation systems such as irrigation and fertilisation heads, irrigation pipes and drip lines, ventilation systems and plastic covers are repaired and examined.

Preparing the seedbeds

Before the fruit and vegetable seeds are planted in the solar greenhouses, they must first be germinated and hardened off in specialized nurseries. During the last season, more than 400 million seedlings of tomato, pepper, courgette, cucumber, aubergine, melon and watermelon varieties were produced in the 70 nurseries in the provinces of Almeria and Granada. More and more seedlings are grafted on rootstock whose strong root system gives them more resistance and vigour.

"The activity of the seed companies is essential, as they are continually innovating by developing new varieties adapted to the demand of both growers and consumers, with lines that are more resistant to pests and with new sizes, shapes and colours and even better flavour. In addition, the good preparations also ensure that the greenhouses can provide 500 million European consumers throughout the year with 4.5 million tonnes of fresh and natural fruit and vegetables that retain their quality, taste and food safety," points out Francisco Góngora, spokesperson for the European consortium Cute Solar.

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, 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 of 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.

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: Cultivating the Taste of Europe in Solar Greenhouses is a program promoted by **APROA**, the Association of Producer Organizations of Fruit and Vegetables in Andalusia, **HORTIESPAÑA**, the Spanish Interprofessional Organization of Fruit and Vegetables, and the Association of European Producer Regions of Fruit and Vegetables, **AREFLH**, with the aim of informing European consumers about the specificities of agricultural production methods in solar greenhouses. It addresses key aspects such as sustainability and environmental impact, as well as safety, quality, and traceability of the products.

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