

The almond tree: a great opportunity for Spanish fruit growing



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The almond is a crop very rooted in Spanish agriculture and our Mediterranean landscape. Traditionally it has been considered as a marginal crop, and as such has been located in lands where other crops could not be established, in dry land and with little care. As a result of this inherited situation, it is the low profitability of traditional plantations, with yields below 100 kg of almond grain per hectare. *In addition, our traditional early-flowering and self-incompatible varieties are often victims of frost when cultivated in peninsular areas or at certain altitudes.*



For years, the United States, the world's largest almond producer, has been developing a strong almond marketing campaign, *supported by its proven cardiosaludable properties*, which has resulted in an exponential increase in demand in new markets (China, India , Russia, South Korea), and in the traditional European and American consumer countries. *This has led to a significant increase in the price of almonds.*

"The rise in prices of the almond has revolutionized the sector and everyone wants to bet on this crop"

Breeders offer new varieties, nurseries expand their facilities and new nurseries arise, there is the conversion to the almond tree from other crops and the incorporation of companies from other sectors, and the one that had almonds, now takes more care, thinking about the economic return . A whole revolution. *All this has coincided with the obtaining of new improved, late flowering and self-compatible varieties by the research centers.*

"The new improved varieties of almond have allowed the colonization of new regions of the interior and northern peninsular where the cultivation of the almond tree was unthinkable due to the frost"

The varieties, obtained in the CEBAS-CSIC of Murcia, "Penta" and "Makako" of extra-late bloom and self-compatible, allow the profitable cultivation of the almond tree practically anywhere in our geography.

But new proposals have also emerged to make plantations more profitable. *Every day the farmer is more aware that he must not save on the crop but invest with his head and reduce his production costs to the maximum. For this, the objective should not be "to spend little" but "to produce a lot".* In this sense, the tendency is to reduce the plantation frames to have a greater number of trees per hectare, maintaining the traditional collection with umbrellas. Even the trees get hit so much that

they have to collect themselves with the so-called "buggies", throwing the almond on meshes or directly to the ground. *A step further is the so-called high density, super high density or hedge crop, with more than 2000 trees per hectare. In this case the philosophy, inherited from the olive grove, is to create hedges of almond trees that can be mechanized to the maximum, obtaining high productions and reducing the labor.*

"But like all crops, the almond tree is not free of market fluctuations and there are people who talk about the almond blossom"



It is true that prices went up a lot from the traditional 3 € / kg of almonds to the 10 € that were paid and now are around 5 €. *Due to the complexity of the international markets it is not possible to determine the price of the almond in the future, but we must plan our plantations so that our cost of production allows us a reasonable profit, even when the price is lower.*

"Some producers have already managed to reduce their production costs to € 2 per kilo of almonds, and they think it could be further reduced. This would ensure the profitability of exploitation even in the most pessimistic of the scenarios "

However, we must be optimistic. *Analysts predict a promising future based on the ability to increase supply in producing countries (the United States, Australia, Spain) in the face of soaring world demand, which is expected to exceed supply by more than 500,000 tons by 2030.*

We have before us a great opportunity that we should not let slip, but for this we must overcome some pending issues.

"Above the traditional feeling that the Spanish almond is the best quality, it has to be in an objective way, adjusting to the demands of the consumer"

In addition, the sector is currently facing a complex structure of nurseries, producers, shellers and industrial disorganized. Many new varieties have been incorporated into the traditional varieties, which implies a difficulty in marketing this excess variability.

Finally, *we have the problem of the bitter almond that must be resolved as soon as possible if we do not want the Spanish almond to be discredited by our competitors*. In this sense, a "Working Group" has recently been awarded for the eradication of bitter almond in Spain, led by ["Almendra del Sur"](#) and in which CEBAS-CSIC participates.

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