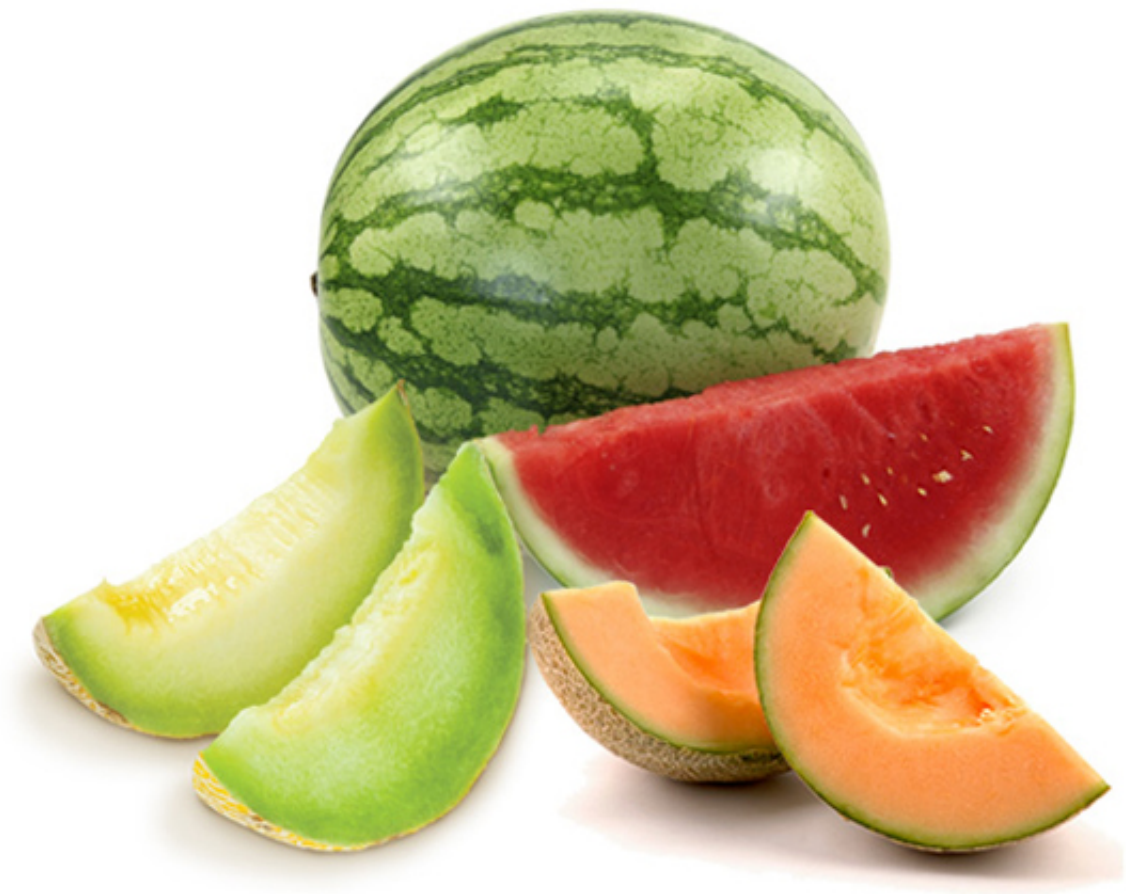
Melon and watermelon: heat changes the trend in the sector and prices rise



By Juan Herrera

After a difficult start of the campaign for melon and watermelon due to the absence of high temperatures, the heat during June and July, both in Spain and in the export markets, allowed the rebound of the quotations.

The melon and watermelon campaign has completely reversed after a dubious start because of the low prices. The lack of heat at the end of spring meant that the demand for the main export markets, mainly European (Germany, United Kingdom, Netherlands, France) was not expected, resulting in an agglomeration of product that caused prices to fall. According to data from the Association of Fruit and Vegetable Producer Organizations of Almería (COEXPHAL) in the case of the Almeria melon, the average price fell 60% below the average of the previous year, while the watermelon fall remained in 10%.

But the arrival of the high temperatures since the beginning of June changed everything. As reflected by the Observatory for Prices and Markets of Andalusia, *the rise in temperatures recorded in Europe since the end of May caused a great demand in the export markets of melon and watermelon, causing orders to exceed the production available in Almería and mark a rise in the prices of both products.*

In Murcia, on the other hand, the heat wave advanced the production and the demand of these fruits, allowing, since then that the market behaves, in the words of the president of COAG Murcia, Miguel Padilla, "with joy". "There is a good set and prices better than last year."

> The situation in the Valencian Community is quite different, and the problem of prices, at least in the area of watermelon, has become structural, leading to the abandonment of this crop by many farmers

The regional agrarian organizations AVA-ASAJA *and La UNIÓ directly blame the large distribution, with prices that in the opinion of AVA-ASAJA "seriously compromise the future of this crop in the autonomous community of Valencia*, as evidenced by the fact that In a period of seven years its area of cultivation has reduced almost 30%".

According to the figures managed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Food and Environment (MAPAMA), *between 2009 and 2015 the hectares destined to the said crop in the Valencian Community suffered a severe decrease of almost 30% when passing from A total of 1,043 to only 743.* Last year, according to the own estimates of this agrarian organization, there was a slight rebound that placed the surface of watermelon around 1,000 hectares, but this year the land destined to this fruit so characteristic of the Summer has fallen again very markedly and barely reach the 500 hectares.

Crisis management

One of the great demands of the sector in situations of low prices is the improvement of the mechanisms of crisis management. A measure that this year has played in favor of producers, especially Almerians, compared to the position of large-scale domain, but sometimes insufficient. Therefore, from the representative entities of the sector call for a greater control of the contracts of purchase and sale, as well as a better organization and programming of the production and commercialization, that allow to regulate the markets and to sell the product at a decent price for the farmer, above costs, and avoiding unnecessary uncertainty and abuses in the dominant links.

Production and export

However, the expected production in the country as a whole, according to the latest data offered by

the Ministry, will be similar to last year.

> Thus, 1.1 million tonnes of watermelon is expected, representing 3.6 percent more than the previous year, on an area of approximately 20,000 hectares

The main producing regions, led by Andalusia, followed by Murcia and Castilla-La Mancha, recorded increases of between four and six percent, which shows the good health of the sector.

In the case of melon, this product has also been destined for about 20,000 hectares, which is to represent a decrease of more than five percent compared to 2016, with a production that will be below 700,000 tons, which shows a change of trend in the sector.

At the export level, as we have explained before, although the low temperatures of May reduced the expected forecasts for the start of the campaign, the situation is normalizing with the passage of the weeks, and will reach, without problems, the figures of last year, according to data from the Spanish Federation of Associations of Producers Exporters of Fruits, Vegetables, Flowers and Live Plants (FEPEX), were slightly more than 440,000 tonnes of melons exported and almost 720,000 of watermelon.

France, Germany, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Portugal are the main export destinations for these crops, whose extra-Community figures are scarcely visible in the overall calculation.

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