



Tomato processing in Portugal



Portugal currently produces 9% of the tomatoes processed in AMITOM countries, with an annual average of 1.1 million tonnes over the last five years. Since the creation of the AMITOM in 1979, this tonnage has increased by 80%.

Processing tomatoes are mainly produced in the plains of the river Tejo (agricultural region of Ribatejo), north-east of Lisbon where 90 % of the crop is grown, and in the south-east (the region of Alentejo) which accounts for 10% of the crop.

Along the Tejo, small holdings are associated with intensive multiple-crop farming on the fertile soils of deep loamy clay. The climate is ideal, with very dry summers and rains only in the spring. There is some risk of floods in April/May and it is estimated that 5% of the fields must be replanted once every 9 or 10 years. Large temperature variations between day and night enhance the colour of the fruit. Agricultural production evolves very rapidly. A few years ago, almost the entire crop was produced by small farmers, « seareiros », who rented small fields (3-5 ha) and would work with their families. This type of farming, which made mechanization impossible, has now disappeared. More typical modern farms are now larger than 40 hectares allocate one-third of their surface to tomato production, using the most recent technology. The larger farmers' now plant in excess of 200 has.

In the Alentejo region in the south, the climate is drier and cultivation is more extensive with bigger fields which are fully mechanized. Altogether, machine harvesting now represents 100 % of the tonnage.

The main varieties continue to be Heinz varieties but seed from Nunhems, Campbell seeds and many others seed companies are widely grown.

The use of plug-seedlings is now widespread, with a plant density of 30 000 plants/ha. Direct seeding only represents 10 % of the surface but it is spreading amongst medium and large producers. Traditional furrow irrigation is has disappeared, and all growers use drip irrigation. Thanks to constant care and attention, the national average passed 90 tons per Ha in 2010, and drip ferti-irrigation and the use of new varieties allows many farmers to surpass 120 t/ha .

The farm-price of fresh tomatoes is no longer fixed in Brussels, and is now the result of free negotiations between processors and growers' organizations. The production of tomatoes in Portugal is now fully decoupled. Each year circa 100 000 tonnes of

tomatoes are produced in Portugal under contract with neighbouring Spanish processors.

In 2011, the volume processed in Portugal reached 1.06 million tonnes, down 15 % from 2010, which was an outstanding season regarding average yield (91 t/ha). The price of fresh tomatoes varied between 69 and 72 €/t delivered.

There are 6 tomato processing firms in Portugal, of which two are amongst the very largest European processors. Tomato paste remains the dominant product but In the last few years, the production of crushed tomatoes has been developing, also for export. More and more tomato powder is also produced from tomato paste by spray-drying, outside the harvesting season. Some firms also produce tomato pizza sauces, natural or flavoured with various spices. Ketchup production and that of various tomato sauces is increasing significantly.

Portuguese tomato processors are represented within AMITOM by AIT.