

Tomato processing in Morocco



Morocco processed an average of 130 000 tonnes of tomatoes over the last three years, although annual variations are important.

According to FAO estimates, the annual Moroccan tomato production reaches 800 000 tonnes of tomatoes, most of which end up on the fresh fruit market. The north-eastern region of the Gharb grows processing tomatoes on approximately 3 000 hectares. The northern region of Tangiers/Tetouan, where the CIL (Lukus) is based, includes a further 500 hectares. Other regions also produce for the processing industry (Chaouia/Ouardigha, Tadla and

Meknes, across the centre of the country from west to east), but crops are limited to less than 100 hectares in total.

Most of the tomatoes grown for industrial purposes are processed into paste and derived products. Two main Moroccan companies lead this sector: the Lukus Industrial Company (based in Larache) with a production of 60 000 to 70 000 tonnes for paste, powders and flakes, and the Conserves de Meknes (brand name Aïcha) which annually processes 30 000 to 40 000 tonnes into small tins of paste for the domestic market.

Several other companies also process tomatoes. Three Casablanca companies, COVEM, Pikarome and DOHA, control the remaining 50 000 to 70 000 tonnes of Morocco's processing tomato potential, estimated at a total of approximately 200 000 tonnes. It should be noted, however, that this volume has not been reached in any previous season, mainly because of the lack of competitiveness of Moroccan products on the European market. This situation has led Moroccan processors to spend several years setting up and consolidating supply contracts. In 2004, farming contracts were made at an average price of 0,7 Dh (0.07 euro) per kg. This system was quickly adopted by the private sector which drew up contracts for 180 000 tonnes in 2004. Cultivation was carried out on 1000 farms, and processing was carried out between July and September in about ten factories.

In this new context, most processors provide the seedlings, the inputs and the agronomic support required by growers. They are also frequently involved in financing local irrigation installations. This system enables processors to improve their control over quality, prices and volumes, particularly during peak consumption periods linked to the tourist industry. The contracts also help growers limit the number of intermediary business interests.

Research also plays a role in the development of the Moroccan tomato industry. A number of farming experiments were carried out in the early 2000's in the Gharb region, the main tomato production zone (80 % of the total tomato acreage), mainly by the Hassan II Institute of Agronomy and Veterinary Practises and by two tomato processing companies : Les Conserves de Meknes (Aïcha) and La Compagnie Industrielle du Lukus (CIL). Results have been encouraging and yields have increased from 30 tonnes/ha to 80 tonnes/ha with furrow irrigation and from 30 to 120 tonnes/ha with localized irrigation. Previously, recorded harvest yields usually stayed between 20 and 40 tonnes/ha. In 2004, the average yield was 45 tonnes per hectare.

Morocco is represented by the FICOPAM (Federation of Moroccan Citrus and Vegetable Canning Industries) to which half of the country's fruit and vegetable canning industries are affiliated, accounting for approximately 80 % of the Moroccan tomato potential.