

WEST AFRICA

# Mango exporters get helping hand

As demand grows in Europe for West African mangoes, exporters are increasingly seeking outside assistance in order to reap the rewards of this encouraging trend

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African mangoes are mainly exported to Europe from the west of the continent, principally from the likes of the Ivory Coast, Senegal, Burkina Faso and Mali. The Pesticides Initiative Programme (PIP), which is financed by the European Development Fund and managed by interprofessional organisation COLEACP, has been active in this particular area since its inception and now provides assistance to 40 African mango exporters, helping them to maintain and develop their market share on the European market.

This year, according to the programme's information and communications manager, Emmanuel Bourcelet, PIP is continuing its efforts to implement quality and traceability systems that facilitate compliance with European requirements. "We are focusing on companies that export mangoes, since the market is increasing in Europe," he tells Eurofruit Magazine. "Like pineapples, mangoes appear to have become more of an everyday purchase than an exotic product."

European imports of fresh mangoes increased by 21 per cent between 2003 and 2007, he reveals, from 174,350 tonnes to 211,700 tonnes. African mango



Exports of African mangoes to the European market increased by 116 per cent between 2003 and 2007

support for mango production, through the creation and dissemination of crop protocols based on good agricultural practices," he says, "together with specific technical tools such as how to control mango fruit fly."

Controlling fruit fly is the main challenge for African mango producers this year, he adds. Indeed, the damage

we raise awareness of this issue among small producers," stresses Mr Bourcelet. "PIP is collaborating with organisations like the CIRAD and CTA in order to disseminate information about how to control the problem."

The second benefit of PIP, he resumes, is individual organisational support. This is achieved via two-year action plans, which help to set up traceability and quality systems in African companies and guarantee food safety for exports of African mangoes. Finally, growers reap the rewards of marketing support, through the promotion of African exports on the European market.

The main European importers of African mangoes remain the Netherlands, taking approximately 100,000 tonnes a year, and the UK, which takes around 40,000 tonnes, according to Mr Bourcelet.

Richard Mea, an expert in hygiene and quality at Ivory Coast consultancy Cabinet Enval says that around 10 per cent of the Ivory Coast's mango production is exported to the EU. "We exported around 14,000 tonnes in both 2007 and 2008. However, looking at the production levels in the groves,

there is a chance that exports will drop in 2009. The main markets for Ivory Coast mangoes are France and the Netherlands, but some exporters also send to Germany and the UK."

For Eric Bambara, an exporter of mangoes from the Ivory Coast, mango exports have increased markedly over the last few years, from a mere 300 tonnes a year back in 2001, to around 1,500-1,700 tonnes today. His growers are committed to guaranteeing high quality and following good farming practices. In 2007, the company gained GlobalGAP certification, but not without difficulty.

Many obstacles still remain for African exporters to the European market, not least the high costs to small companies of certifications such as GlobalGAP. "The costs to businesses of certifications like GlobalGAP are significant," says Mr Bambara, "and selling prices to European importers are not so high, even after gaining the certifications."

"PIP has helped us to strengthen our capabilities through training and general assistance in gaining our GlobalGAP certification. It is not necessarily the certification costs that are the problem, but the costs of getting the training and updating everything prior to certification. African producers definitely need more assistance in this regard."

Mr Bambara believes that the PIP programme could also provide help



Ivory Coast-based mango exporter Eric Bambara

to African farmers by assisting them in developing the transformation side of their businesses. "This would help to increase exports and boost value," he explains. "The PIP programme could help us with this endeavour in the future."

African growers face a number of challenges in reaching the European market, resumes Mr Mea. "Clearly one major difficulty is affording the costs associated with the private voluntary standards, such as GlobalGAP, Tesco Nature's Choice and ETI," he says.

**IB Négoce is a Malian mango exporter, created in 1997 and specialised in the packaging and sale of fruit and vegetables. For 2009, according to the company's Issa Bagayoko, it expects to see an increase in volumes and intends to explore new markets.**

"We started off exporting solely to the French market," he says, "but now our mangoes are sent to six European countries. However, the environmental factor is gradually becoming a big problem for exports of our products to Europe. We used to export basically everything by plane, but today 90 per cent of our exports are sent by boat, so volumes have increased markedly."

Like all West African mango exporters, IB Négoce follows the demands of European retailers and consumers, meaning that GlobalGAP certification is essential, as is offering produce that "looks good visually and comes in nice-looking packaging", according to Mr Bagayoko.

However, he warns that certifications are at risk of becoming an obstacle to the evolution of the horticultural sector in ACP countries, due to "their high cost and the length of the certificate, which is very short at only one year". "Importers are becoming increasingly strict on the validity of these certificates," he says, "which can sometimes come to an end in the middle of the campaign. The only real solution is to lengthen the validity of these certificates."

Mr Bagayoko highlights the importance of PIP in providing assistance in training businesses, farmers and their employees to improve production techniques and respect for environmental norms, as well as helping with documentation and certification. "PIP's actions have enabled IB Négoce to develop the technical and managerial qualities necessary to make us competitive in such a tough environment," he says.

"To those that are not certified, the European market is slowly fencing itself off. The costs of certification are prohibitive for those players that do not have assistance from programmes like PIP. However, even for those working with PIP, the costs of updating the infrastructure and recruiting qualified personnel can be prohibitive. Moreover, certifications have no bearing on the selling price of the export product. We need to continue to support the sector, helping companies to update their infrastructure and looking at new opportunities to add value to their products, including through transformation."

Two further potential difficulties are creeping up on growers: environmental standards are becoming ever stricter, in response to public opinion throughout Europe; and the global financial crisis, although yet to make an impact, is lurking just around the corner.

"In the Ivory Coast, the environmental code is gradually starting to be applied to all economic sectors," says Mr Mea. "Players in the mango sector will have to show their respect for the code in the short or medium term. The issue of environmental protection is definitely more sensitive for products that are exported to Europe."

"We are starting to see new environmental requirements for exports to Europe," adds Mr Bourcelet, "which is why the environment will be a strategic action theme for PIP, phase two of which will start in 2009. We have already created a new training module for the environmental issue, which is going to be

used during the education of trainers." As for the economic situation, Mr Bourcelet states that it has had no impact as yet. "The economic crisis seems to be causing more problems for East African horticultural exports, such as French beans from Kenya, since their traditional market, the UK, has been particularly badly affected by the crisis and the pound has weakened considerably," he says.

However, Mr Mea believes that it is too early to judge the effect the crisis may have on the African mango sector. "Although the impact is not yet perceptible in our sector, we will have to wait for the proper start of the 2009 campaign around the beginning of April in order to gauge the real effect," he concedes. "Of course, our mango exports are extremely dependent on demand from the European market, which is itself going through a crisis."

However, despite the various uncertainties on the horizon and given the current economic situation, the outlook for African mango exports appears bright. The European mango market is without doubt increasing, as are African exports to Europe.

"The trends are extremely positive," Mr Bourcelet agrees. "The mango industry in Africa is an illustration of what can be achieved by cooperating to achieve development in ACP countries. What is required is assistance in creating sustainable trade that enables the setup of good agricultural practices in Africa, meets the demands of the European market and maintains small producers in the horticultural industry."

## African mango exports to Europe (tonnes)

Country	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Ivory Coast	7,176	11,122	9,835	14,391	14,706
Senegal	2,067	2,810	3,011	7,071	4,702
Burkina Faso	770	925	1,164	2,157	3,191
Ghana	-	177	268	293	983
Gambia	552	593	608	785	857
Guinea	458	562	85	388	469
Cameroon	113	115	138	83	178

Source: Eurostat

exports to Europe have even succeeded in outpacing this high growth, increasing by 116 per cent, from 11,000 tonnes in 2003 to 24,000 tonnes in 2007.

Mr Bourcelet identifies three main benefits that growers working with PIP receive. "First, collective technical

inflicted on crops by these flies affects the quality of the fruit, as well as availability, both for local consumption and for export. The reach of the invasive Asian species *Bactrocera invadens* now extends to the entire West African region. "It is extremely important that