

MADAGASCAR & ISRAEL

PIP aids Madagascan growers

Madagascar may lead the pack when it comes to lychee exports to Europe, but increasingly strict requirements are beginning to make life difficult for growers

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Madagascar is by far the largest supplier of lychees to the European market, exporting more than five times the volume of its closest rival, South Africa. Madagascar produces around 100,000 tonnes of lychees each year, of which 20,000-25,000 tonnes is exported, mostly to France and Germany.

Although the country comfortably leads the market, constantly rising standards throughout Europe have put pressure on the approximately 30,000 families involved in lychee production in Madagascar, forcing them to make considerable investments in order to cling on to this vital market. The Pesticides Initiative Programme (PIP), funded by interprofessional organisation COLEACP, which helps producers to meet the requirements of European supermarkets, is therefore of great importance.



Madagascar exports 20,000-25,000 tonnes of lychees to Europe every year

Yvan Razakandisa, general manager of Madagascan exporter Qualitymad, is extremely grateful for the PIP's assistance. "The PIP has supported us in all our efforts with regard to quality, standards and logistics, helping to finance improvements concerning hygiene, food safety and traceability, and assisting with the certification costs," he tells Eurofruit Magazine.

In the last two years, Qualitymad has constructed a new 600m² building on a site of 4,000m². It has also continued to organise and structure its producers, as well as establishing a system of quality management from production to delivery, with a particular focus on safety, hygiene and logistics.

The company produces the Kwai Mi variety, also known as Mauritius. According to Mr Razakandisa, this is a high quality variety, 22-25g in weight, 15-30mm in size and bright red in colour.

"These last years, we have exported 250-300 tonnes of conventional lychees during a campaign of 5-8 days," he adds. "The lychees are shipped by boat to importers in Rungis, Paris. Our goal for the next campaign in November is to approach our production capacity of 450-500 tonnes. We intend to do this not just by boosting volumes of conventional lychees, but also by offering produce with GlobalGAP certification and extending the campaign through the use of airfreight at the beginning of the campaign."

Leading Israeli exporter Agrexco has exported its first Carmel-branded lychees of the season, according to the company, with the first fruit of the campaign hitting European markets in mid-June.

This year, Agrexco aims to export around 400 tonnes of lychees, double last season's volume, and the company plans to use airfreight rather than seafreight so that the fruit reaches the market at the optimum level of ripeness.

"As a result of intensive research and development efforts, Agrexco will be able to export a premium sweet fruit with a lasting red colour and a velvety texture," says product manager Bezalel Madmon.

Agrexco's commitment to quality is illustrated by its decision not to export the fruit later than August, despite demand continuing through September.

"We think that the brand name, Carmel, has to be associated with premium agricultural produce," Mr Madmon said. "We will not take the risk of blemishing it in spite of the financial temptation."

The Mauritius variety is the main type grown in Israel, with the majority of growers concentrated in the area around Lake Galilee and western Galilee.

Exports of Madagascan lychees to Europe (tonnes)

	2004	2005	2006	2007
France	13,913	16,366	14,150	20,917
Netherlands	7,421	4,307	8,819	6,251
UK	3,454	3,137	2,979	3,944
Germany	116	163	371	134
Belgium & Luxembourg	1,926	1,880	244	298
Italy	1,204	91	98	1,280
Sweden	24	37	38	50
Denmark	3	22	18	28
Spain	6	6	7	4
Portugal	2	9	2	5

Source: COLEACP & Eurostat

The last lychee campaign started several weeks before the opening in the market, according to Mr Razakandisa, so a large volume was dumped on the market. Furthermore, climatic problems made the campaign very difficult, with lychees developing mildew. Prices reportedly suffered as a result.

Over the last two years, Mr Razakandisa has seen an increase in demand for higher quality and for systems that guarantee the health and safety of workers. "Consumers are concerned about these matters," he says, "and interest has been growing for lychees with GlobalGAP certification, as well as for organic and Fairtrade products. The image of Madagascan lychees was tarnished in the past through problems with quality, but exporters are conscious of this and are constantly working to correct that image."

According to Mr Razakandisa, there are a number of markets that are beginning to demonstrate an interest in Madagascan lychees, including in northern Europe, eastern Europe, Russia, the Mediterranean and the Middle East.