

Litchi from Mexico

A new world player

Although it was introduced at the beginning of the twentieth century, litchi really only spread in Mexico in recent years with encouragement for diversification. The domestic market is already profitable and Mexico has now decided to export the fruit.

Litchi is said to have been introduced in Mexico in 1914 in Sinaloa state and only spread to the other parts of the country from the 1960s onwards. A count made in 1996 showed that litchi was planted on 1 024 hectares in 10 states, but only 245 hectares produced marketable fruits.

By 2000, the area had increased strongly to 2 000 ha. Enthusiasm for the fruit resulted from dissemination and the attraction of the crop for farmers, who saw in it a way of making their holdings more profitable and of being certain to be able to sell the crop.

The two varieties 'Mauritius' and 'Brewster' are grown, the second being dominant in the states further north because of its bright red colour, an asset for marketing. However, the stone is larger (21%) and the pulp content is low (55%).

Growers are increasingly attracted by litchi year after year and today 4 000 hectares of plantations are spread among 14 states. Potential production is between 20 000 and 40 000 tonnes. This makes Mexico the fifth or sixth largest producer country in the world and it is present on the market from the end of April to the end of July. The domestic market is buoyant and the prices paid at production (USD 2.3 to 3.00 per kg) are the stuff that exporters' dreams are made of!

The case of San Luis Potosi state

Litchi was introduced in the Huasteca de San Luis Potosi in 1960 and remained there on the land of a single grower (4.5 ha) until 1985.

The crop had already spread widely in the state by 1996, with 113 ha spread among small farms of the Huasteca.

The poor profitability of the traditional crops in the region should be

whose prices are falling and vanillin is not very profitable.

Litchi had gained real importance by 2003 with 600 ha devoted to it, in particular as a result of government campaigns to promote awareness of the crop. Unfortunately, this was done with no agronomic support for growers. Plantations were established but problems soon arose. The problems are much the same in most producer countries and include:

- alternate bearing,
- pruning,
- irrigation,
- shell browning in the orchard.



highlighted in discussion of the attraction of litchi. Indeed, 30 000 ha of citrus fruits grown for juice was abandoned because of problems of fruitfly, the presence of tristeza and the prices paid by the processing factory. In addition, coffee prices are low and outlets unreliable. The same applies to sugarcane and vanilla,

Litchi — Mexico Cultivated areas — in ha		
States	1996	2003
Sinaloa	295.0	50
San Luis Potosi	113.0	600
Nayarit	65.5	300
Puebla	49.4	500
Veracruz	202.8	550
Oaxaca	70.0	450
Baja California Sur	4.0	50
Campeche	180.0	200
Hidalgo	30.0	150
Coahuila	15.0	15
Jalisco		180
Morelos		100
Chiapas		200
Michoacan		185
Total	1 024.7	3 980

Aiming at exports

The evolution of cultural practices is an important factor for this country that wishes to go into export business. Yields are low today as a result of pollination problems that in turn result from unsuitable fertilisation. The full crop management sequence should be reviewed in order to give growers the keys to success.

It is also necessary to stimulate the quantity and quality of domestic production by training farmers and exporters in rational orchard management techniques.

Exports from San Luis de Potosi state started this year with fruits that had not been treated with sulphur, but this postharvest aspect is not yet fully mastered. A closer link with local universities and the international research sector should be sought ■

Christian Didier, Cirad
christian.didier@cirad.fr