

Update

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Beacon Commodities



A recent trip to visit suppliers took us to Murcia in Spain. Murcia is a largely agricultural region and provides the world with a range of agricultural produce from wheat and maize to vegetables and citrus fruits. The peel harvest is viewed as a cottage industry and this year's harvest proved difficult, particularly for the lemon.



Sweet orange tree



Lemon tree

Harvesting citrus peels

The orange and lemon groves that surround Murcia are predominantly used for the production of fresh fruit and juice. The oranges are harvested first and only once a year from January onwards. The lemons are slightly later, but can (depending on the crop) be harvested twice a year, once in March and a smaller crop in October/November. The citrus fruits are harvested and processed into either juice or fresh fruit to be sold to major retailers and processors around the world. After this harvest is complete, some fruit will be left on the trees and it is this fruit that is hand-picked by local families and then processed into the dried peels.

The first stage of the process having been selected and hand-picked is the peeling of the fruit by hand leaving the peel and some of the pith. The peel is then hung along a wire to dry naturally in the sun for 3-5 days depending on the weather conditions. The peels are then sold to our suppliers whom act as collectors in the local area.

The quantities harvested depend on the orders received and therefore at Beacon Commodities we are asked to provide our collectors with an indication of potential quantities for the forthcoming year.

Difficulties with the harvest

Until recently, the acreage under orange and lemon trees was reducing due to major scale residential development within Spain. With recent increases in prices (both in the juice/fresh fruit and the peel market) and a decline in residential development, this area now has many new groves being planted. Added to this, a citrus tree can start producing harvestable fruit within 3-4 years.

This year's harvest proved extremely problematic for lemon peel as an unusually cold spell early in the year pushed the orange harvest later which therefore affected the lemon. This meant when annual orders were made the harvest was only just under way and the produce arrived later than usual in the UK. This is expected to be a one-off situation but as with any



Lemon tree after harvest with the new crop coming through

crop, nature plays its role. Suggestions are to purchase more than required initially to therefore retain a carryover stock should the harvest prove problematic in the year to come.

New plantings on the outskirts of Murcia with the statue of Christ overlooking the Murcian huerta in the background



Sweet orange ribbons being loaded up into the hammer mill

Sweet or bitter oranges

The large majority of trees within the Murcia area are sweet orange due to their use as fresh fruit and in juice production. However, some years ago when the sweet oranges were at a premium, vast quantities were being stolen. As a response, farmers planted bitter orange trees around the edge of the groves to trick passers-by as to what the grove actually contained. Added to this, the bitter trees have large thorns which help to dissuade any potential thieves. The fruit from these bitter orange trees are used mainly for the production of dried peels.



Hammer mill

Kibbled peel

At Beacon Commodities, we have noticed an increase in popularity for the use of kibbled citrus peel instead of the traditional ribbons. We were lucky to see some of our stock being kibbled on a modern hammer mill. After milling, the kibbled peels and dust are separated using a blower and the peels are put in 25 kilo bags with the dust sold locally as either orange or lemon powder.



A bitter orange thorn



Kibbled sweet orange peel and sweet orange dust

