

Mission accomplished for the first webinar of the Eurocastanea network

Last week, the European Chestnut Network organised its first ever webinar on the current harvest, market prospects in Europe, and the impact of the health crisis.

On October 7, Eurocastanea, the European chestnut network brought online nearly 70 operators from the chestnut sectors: producers, APOs and marketers from 8 countries. Participants from Austria, Spain, France, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Morocco and Chile connected to follow this mini conference on this season's chestnut production and the impact of the covid-19 on consumption. Three main themes emerged : tree's health, new plantations and the 2020 production figures.

The management of the gall wasp

European countries have all achieved a protocol for the organic management of the gall wasp (*Dryocosmus kuriphilus*) through the introduction of Torymus. This method is effective and allows a fairly good control of the pest who caused significant losses to past year's production. For example, this solution made it possible for Italy to return to its full production potential. However, Spain, Portugal and the Limousin area in France are still showing yield losses, the populations of the pest and the auxiliary are not yet balanced.

The development of chestnut plantations

The European market faces a high demand in chestnut but the offer remains low. Still, efficient plantation dynamics are now set up in many European regions such as Portugal, the North of Spain and in France.

Production prospects 2020

Portugal estimates that its production will amount to 36.000 tonnes, with medium sizes and good quality. Its production is developing with the entry into the market of fruits from new orchards.

In France, there is a fairly good harvest in the south-east. It is weaker in the southwest.

The Italian harvest will probably be similar to that of 2019, with large differences from region to region. Italy seems to partially recover its production potential.

The production forecast for Spain is around 28.000 tonnes, it will be in deficit due to losses linked to the gall wasp.

Finally, Austria is seeing its production increase, new rational orchards are gradually coming into production. But its harvested volumes have always been much lower than those of other EU producer countries.

Common issues

During the webinar, topics common to the 5 countries of the Eurocastanea network were highlighted. The first subject is the control of diseases (chestnut blight, fruit rots, root dieback) due to climate change, hot and dry summers and autumns. Second important point, the establishment of a water management policy appeared to be essential for a viable production. Finally, speakers from each country recognized that it is indispensable to stimulate the market and consumption, and to communicate, especially to young people.

This webinar humbly replaced The European Chestnut Days which should have taken place in New Aquitaine (Limousin) in September this year. This major annual meeting of producers, marketers, processors and researchers is postponed until September 2021.

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The webinar co-organizers were:

- For France: Interprofessional Union of Chestnut in South-West France (SNPC), National Union of Chestnut Producers, Interco Aquitaine, AREFLH
- For Portugal: Refcast,
- For Spain: Red Estatal del Castaño
- For Italy: CSDC, Centro di Studio e Documentazione sul Castagno, Chestnut R&D Center
- For Austria: ARGE Zukunft Edelkastanie

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