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Murcian citrus aims for new markets

Spanish citrus exporters are making increasing gains in markets in Asia, Oceania and North America, thanks in part to a significant rise in lemon exports.

The country's main citrus-producing region, Murcia, shipped some 506,139 tonnes of citrus last year, worth an estimated €268m, and exporters are reporting growing success in non-traditional markets.

Although Germany, France, the UK and Italy still remain Murcia's key export markets, the region's Council of Agriculture and Water said that 4,269 tonnes of citrus were shipped to the US this season, while exports to Oceania and Asia, and in particular Japan, are rising.

Some of the most dramatic gains have been seen in the region's lemon deal, with some 436,880 tonnes of the fruit exported during the 2006/07 season, a figure that accounted for 80 per cent of Spain's total lemon exports for the year.

Around half of Murcia's lemon production is exported to other states in the EU, according to the official figures, with some 428,000 tonnes sent to core European markets between September 2006 and August 2007.

The region enjoyed significant export gains in Portugal and the Czech Republic during the campaign, with shipments rising by 22.5 per cent to 5,375 tonnes and 5.8 per cent to 14,900 tonnes respectively.

However, non-traditional markets have been the source of the most dramatic growth. According to the council, exports to Canada, the US, Russia, Switzerland and Croatia increased by 848 per cent during the 2005/06 campaign.

The organisation said the export rise was based not just on the region's reputation for high quality citrus but on the fact

that its produce has a high level of food safety and traceability.

In a separate development, Murcian citrus producer association Asaja Murcia has claimed that the rise in Egyptian citrus exports to the EU could pose a consumer safety hazard. Egypt, according to Asaja Murcia secretary general Alfonso Gálvez Caravaca, was rapidly increasing its production but without the same phytosanitary safety controls seen in Europe. The North African country produced over 3m tonnes of citrus during the 2006/07 campaign, and is increasing its growing capability by up to 8,000ha a year, the organisation added.