



By Tom Joyce

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## BelOrta ready for winter

BelOrta will see a jump in tomato production this winter, as the Belgian cooperative responds to demand for year-round availability and high-quality taste



**B**elgian cooperative BelOrta expects to see an increase in tomato production of 15-20 per cent this coming winter, according to Maarten Verhaegen, the group's sales division manager for tomatoes.

Furthermore, every tomato variety available in the summer months will now also be available during the winter, with the San Marzano plum tomato set to be available for the first time this winter.

"San Marzano is a new one for this winter," says Verhaegen, "while other varieties, including beef tomatoes, on-the-vine, cherry and grape, will now be available in larger volumes than in previous winters. We have a couple of new greenhouses, and some of the older ones are now illuminated with lamps, which increases volumes."

According to Verhaegen, BelOrta's customers have long demanded high quality, but now they are demanding that high quality all year round.

"In Belgium, we receive a lot of imported tomatoes from the Netherlands, but these have to be harvested when they are still quite green," he says. "Here we can harvest the tomatoes ripe, giving them a superior taste, and that is something our customers want, in Belgium, as well as in the UK, Germany and France. Thanks to the experience of our growers, we can deliver the quality and taste that they expect, including in the winter months. We guarantee that consumers will not be able to taste the difference between our summer tomatoes and our winter tomatoes."

The increase in winter tomato production will also respond to a growing demand in Belgium for local produce, according to Verhaegen.

"Many consumers in Belgium wish to avoid tomatoes transported all the way from Spain, Morocco or Turkey out of a concern for the environment," he says. "We use engines run on natural gas to warm the greenhouses. We also have enough rain throughout the year for irrigation. Plus, we grow on compost, allowing us to better recycle the water. These factors give us an advantage over many of our competitors."