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By Tom Joyce

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Cairo 3A in pomegranate push

Encouraged by the growing reputation of pomegranates as an ultra-healthy superfood, the Egyptian producer has big plans for the fruit



Egyptian producer-exporter Cairo 3A has its sights set on becoming a global market leader in the production of both fresh and processed pomegranates, as it seeks to take advantage of the fruit's growing reputation for health.

"After many centuries in which the pomegranate was revered for its medicinal properties, the fruit was forgotten in the rush of pharmaceutical products that followed," says chief executive officer Aly El Gamil. "Now it is once again gaining centre stage as a modern-day fountain of health, loaded with nutrients, antioxidants and fibre."

The company's strategic focus is both on varietal development, including the creation of new and different varieties, and on volumes. "We currently have two main pomegranate varieties, Wonderful and 116, as well as a coded variety," says El Gamil. "We have 525ha of pomegranate production, which is the largest planted area of pomegranates in Egypt and

amounts to a yearly output of around 19,000 tonnes, which we sell under our Qutoof brand. We have two primary farms, the main one in Wadi el Natrun on the Cairo-Alexandria desert road."

Cairo 3A's increasing focus on pomegranates is a response to the growing consumer interest in healthy, fresh produce, as well as to the gap between the demand and the available supply of pomegranate concentrate.

"Our incorporation of processed products is intended to prevent profit and post-harvest losses by addressing perishability issues," says El Gamil. "In response to a gap in the current market for pomegranate arils, we are also in negotiations to install an aril-packing line for ready-to-eat pomegranate arils, both fresh and frozen. Aside from pomegranates, we also produce citrus, stonefruit, grapes, mangoes, guavas, pears and some berries, so we foresee more opportunities for fresh-cut fruit in the future."

The company's main export destinations are the UK and Europe, South East Asia, East Asia and the Gulf, with plans currently being drawn up for expansion into South Korea and China. Aggressive pricing strategies from competitors including Turkey pose one of the biggest challenges, which the company seeks to overcome through a focus on taste and high quality and a longer season.

"As a quality-oriented, full integrated agri project with our own farm, packhouse and coldstores, we are focused on in-house quality supervision at all stages of the process," says El Gamil. The company is the first in the Middle East and Africa to specialise in producing pomegranate concentrate in accordance with the AIJN (Association of the Industry of Juices and Nectars) standards, he adds.

Changes in weather patterns as a result of climate change are another challenge for Cairo 3A, according to El Gamil, necessitating the rotation of the company's production.

"Global increases in costs, changing labour labour facilities include housing spaces, benefits, incentives, training programmes

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formats, fluctuating fuel and fertiliser costs – all pose difficulties for growers worldwide,” he says. “Labour is the most important component of production for us, and we strive to ensure fair employment benefits and equal opportunity for all employees. Our

lockers and a restaurant, all of which aim to create a safe and healthy living environment on the farm. We place significant effort and investment in our human capital and permanent labour, particularly on highly skilled workers. Our facilities, competitive

and job advancement opportunities are directly targeted at retaining our highly skilled labourers.”