

The international marketing magazine for fresh produce buyers in Europe



By Maura Maxwell

Monday 8th July 2019, 11:39 GMT

Sales hot up for Picota cherries

Good weather has resulted in optimum quality this season, producers say



L eading UK retailers are reporting a strong start for Spanish Picota cherries as they begin their six-week season in store.

According to producers in Spain's Jerte Valley, the variety's high quality is expected to continue this season, following excellent growing conditions.

Pedro Garcia Mesias, commercial director of Agrupación de Cooperativas Valle del Jerte, the main cooperative supplying the UK with Picota cherries, said: "5,000 tonnes of Picota cherries were produced in the Jerte Valley last year.

"We anticipate a top quality product as usual and high volumes this season, due to great weather throughout the growing period. This has enabled prolonged maturation, resulting in a beautifully sweet cherry."

The main point of differentiation of Picota cherries is that they are sold naturally stalkless. The stalk is left on the tree when harvested by hand, ensuring the fruit is only picked at optimum ripeness.

They are particularly sweet with high levels of brix (around 20°) dark red in colour, and have a more fleshy, crunchy texture than other cherries. They also have a longer shelf life compared to other varieties.

Promotional activity for Picota has been running since 2000, and Agrupación – with support from Cooperativa Del Campo Navaconcejo – is aiming to highlight the uniqueness of the DO certified fruit, which is on sale in UK supermarkets until the beginning of August.

The Jerte Valley is the only place in the world to grow the Picota cherry variety, which is protected by a denomination of origin (DO) certificate, verifying that the fruit has been grown, harvested and packed under rigorous quality control procedures. Customers can therefore be reassured that they are purchasing the unique Picota brand.

The traditional methods in which Picota cherries are grown and harvested have been unchanged for hundreds of years.

Once the cherries have reached full maturation, all of the valley's families carefully hand-pick the fruit, from trees grown on terraces carved out of the steep Jerte Valley sides, using only a ladder and basket.

In contrast, the baskets are then transported to a state-of-the-art packhouse, where the cherries are meticulously sorted through, using advanced optical technology and then distributed around Europe.

This year's integrated marketing campaign kicks off with retailer activities, including online advertisements; head office sampling and Sainsbury's magazine advertorials. Additionally, consumer titles will also carry advertorials during the season highlighting Picota's unique characteristics; nutritional attributes and recipe ideas.

Competitions will be running on various online magazines and consumers can expect to see recipes showcasing Picota from some of the UK's top food bloggers.

A selection of campaign recipes will feature

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