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## Sicilian citrus sector counts cost of storm damage

Oranfrizer said its goal is to fully recover production so that it can meet growing demand on the European market



**S**icilian citrus growers are assessing the damage caused by the hurricane that struck the east of the island this week.

One of the areas biggest suppliers, Oranfrizer, told Fruitnet that it would be at least a week before the full impact of the storm would be seen, but its goal was to fully recover production.

"It was a continuous flood. We immediately joined forces to rescue resources and people in difficulty who, during the most acute moments of the downpour, were able to find safety in our premises," said CEO Nello Alba.

"We are hosting the Italian Civil Protection, the Red Cross, and the Fire Brigade, offering services and electricity. About 4ha of Sicilian production facilities were completely destroyed by flooding. The largest part remains available but every hour of rain is now a problem.

"We are waiting for the state of emergency to be declared, and we hope that, this time, full compensation measures will be guaranteed, and quickly."

According to Alba, Sicilian farmers are still recovering from serious flooding in 2018 and have yet to receive any compensation, which in any case has been cut by the government by 80 per cent.

"In order to recover the destroyed citrus groves, it is necessary to return the full amount," he said.

The consequences of this critical phase in the season remain to be seen. In line with the strategy of its parent company, Unifrutti Europe, Oranfrizer is due to start the 2021/22 citrus season with the selection of the first orange varieties due to be available in stores shortly before the more eagerly awaited blood orange campaign gets underway.

The company said the coming citrus season would be marked by a shortage of volumes, with around 30 per cent less product available. Oranfrizer will focus on the Tarocco Ippolito, Sciara, Meli and Sant Alfio sicilian cultivars.

Gianluca Defendini, CEO of Unifrutti Europe, commented: "in Sicily we will restore the citrus groves damaged by the storm. With all available Italian crops, we will strive to meet the demand to respond to the trend of growing orange consumption, which is being driven by their valuable vitamin C content".

Defendini added that demand for red-fleshed oranges and edible skin is also on the rise and that the company planned to increase production of both.

"We are investing in excellent territories both in Italy and in other production

countries, and we will expand low

"For 365 days a year, the markets will

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chemical and chemical free cultivation,” he said.

Blood oranges and other citrus fruits from Sicily will mainly be distributed in Italy, but will also be exported, mainly to Europe and the UK.

Oranfrizer said the supply of sustainably-grown, high-quality citrus with edible peel has always been one of the strong points of the Sicilian supply chain, which has been making steady gains on the export market.

alternate between the harvesting – based on the season – of different products located in Italy, Argentina and South Africa,” Defendini said.

“There is no competition between the production of the different countries in which we operate with Unifrutti; rather, there is continuity. Diversification of supply will ensure a constant supply of high quality citrus fruits .”

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