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By Maura Maxwell

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Buoyant outlook for tomatoes

The growing focus on health, sustainability and convenience present a huge opportunity for the tomato industry



The inaugural Global Tomato Congress drew 300 delegates

Tomatoes are one of the produce categories that stand to benefit the most from the increasing popularity of plant-based meals, offering plenty of potential for growth within the sector; according to Kantar's Joe-Shaw Roberts.

Setting the scene for the inaugural Global Tomato Congress, which took place in Rotterdam this week, Shaw-Roberts noted that as a key ingredient in many vegetarian and vegan recipes, tomatoes are in a great position to exploit the healthy food trend.

And this is not the only trend that tomatoes stand to benefit from: with smaller varieties like cherry tomatoes making an ideal snacking product, suppliers have an opportunity to fill more consumption gaps, as well as to encourage more children into the category and make them life-long consumers.

Delegates heard how 98 per cent of Spanish households purchase tomatoes, the highest rate in Europe. If the level of household penetration could be raised in other countries like the UK, where the level currently stands at 93 per cent and France (95 per cent), this would translate into a significant increase in sales, Shaw-Roberts said.

As in other produce categories, sustainability is become a key consideration for tomato suppliers, who will have to ensure that consumer concerns over climate change and excess packaging are properly addressed.

Shaw-Roberts pointed out that more should be done to engage consumers with different varieties, noting that "the more we buy the more valuable we are as consumers". Indeed the data shows that while new varieties are pushing growth within the category, ordinary tomatoes are struggling.

"Tomatoes are already an incredible success story across Europe, but we can do more," he said.

"All countries should look to drive engagement with different varieties to drive category growth, and communicating the taste and benefits of different varieties can help this process."

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