STOLLER EUROPE S.L.U.
Polígono Industrial Pla de la Vallonga
Calle Alisios, 24
03006 Alicante (Spain)
(+34) 965 110 522
info@stollereurope.com

CITRUS: COMMENTS AND CONSIDERATIONS

Citrus production in Spain accounts for 5% of the world's production, being the seventh country in importance, behind: China, Brazil, USA, Mexico and India. The percentage of surface area destined to this crop in Spain, is distributed as follows: 55.4% corresponds to the Valencian Community; 29.4% to Andalusia; 12.2% to Murcia and, finally, the remaining 3% to Catalonia and the rest of Spain.

The **2016-2017 campaign** started with production forecasts of around seven million tons; a figure that was closer to that of a "normal" season and far from the scarce 5.52 million tons harvested in 2015/16. But it was marked by different problems:

From the climatological point of view, the summer of 2015 was very warm and long, (high temperatures reaching well into the months of October and November) and preceded an equally warm summer in 2016. This reduced the amount of "chill hours" required by this crop for its correct development and presupposed a reduced bud breaking capacity and quality for the following 2016-2017 campaign.

Contrary to what was expected, the trees presented a good bud break and even fruit set. However: the lack of nutrient reserves; the induction of a very gradual and low-quality flowering alongside the previously described conditions, aggravated by the climatic conditions of the year and the absence of rainfall, gave way to "purges" of fruits, (even those in advanced stages of development) and to low commercial quality fruits.

On the other hand, the burden of the EU agreement with South Africa, which allowed for the massive entry of oranges from this country without tariffs, hampered the beginning of the sale of the harvest of early varieties of oranges and tangerines (Marisol, Oronules, Clemenrubí, Basol, Navelina, ...), this fact caused the saturation of the market and the consequent fall in prices.

Over the months, these prices stabilized in the different producing areas, for the different mid-season varieties (Clemenvilla, Hernandina, Salustiana, ...) and late varieties (Navels, Valencias, Nadorcott, Tango, ...), reaching interesting values for high quality fruits.

The **2017/2018 citrus campaign** forecasts a production of 5.66 million tons, which represents a decrease of 20.1%. The first quotations of the month of July, beyond the problems regarding the fruits imported from South Africa, are showing a market with an "optimistic" perspective, due to the lack of production in different varieties, but especially, of early oranges (Navelina, L7, M7, Fukumoto, ...).

From the climatological point of view, as already indicated, the summer of 2016 was once more very warm and long and preceded a similar summer in 2017, in which the high temperatures lasted well into December.

This raised again, a possible scenario for the 2017-2018 campaign, similar to the previous year, with physiological disorders that would involve a gradual flowering and possible problems of fruit caliber and lack of commercial and organoleptic qualities, (caused by over-ripening processes and senescence), as well as a high incidence of skin conditions.

So far, the quality of the harvest is proving to be good and the rhythm of the market to be dynamic, but the conditions already mentioned along with the strong winds and the possible presence of rain and dew, can give way to defects and alterations in the fruits that, along with fungal attacks or their physiological abscission, can affect the future of the campaign.

On the other hand, it should be mentioned as a point in favor, that the low temperatures of the last days of December, (except for the areas where they have caused frost), will favor the conservation of the fruits, (already mature in most varieties that are yet to be harvested), before treatments with fungicides and, in the case of varieties with problems of endemic physiological abscission or induced by sharp differences between diurnal and nocturnal temperatures, treated with anti-abscission products.

Under these premises and with the need to make the plantations profitable, expenses must be rationalized, trying to manage the production from the technical, economic and commercial points of view. But, most importantly, the producer must devote his efforts into producing fruits of the highest quality, to differentiate himself in the market and thus be able to defend his interests in the sale of his harvest.

For eminently small areas, as is the case of the **Valencian Community**, this type of production hinders the progression of citrus growing in an area that enjoys the best geographical location and weather conditions for the development of the crop, due to compromised profitability, mainly due to rising labor costs and the massification of a market that can only be profitable in cases of: varieties with specific marketing windows or with "limited" productions; Production losses due to adverse weather conditions or "exclusive" markets.

For all, it is essential to move towards the mechanization of plantations or grouping plots, in order to reduce production costs, as is the case in other regions such as Andalusia or Murcia, where the average size of plantations is much bigger.

To be able to address these approaches, it is necessary, depending on: the agronomic characteristics of the crop, the variety and the marketing needs, to propose options that ensure: a balanced development of the plants at a vegetative level; good quality flowerings and fruit set, even in adverse conditions; high productions without annual alternations; fruits with outstanding physical and organoleptic qualities (caliber, skin quality, color, soluble solids content, maturity index and turgor), which ensure a high commercial value, or manage harvesting, thus ensuring entry into the market at the time of greatest interest for the producer.

Stoller focuses its actions in line with the mentioned above, by designing tools based on what we have been specializing in for many years: PLANT PHYSIOLOGY. Which is on the "Know-how" acquired through years of research and development, we propose strategies to solve crop problems and give options to control these problems, so that the producer can differentiate and defend his harvest in the market and make his plantation profitable.

In this context and with the progressive restriction by the EC and the importing countries, of active substances and their residues in fruits, products such as: Stimulante, Hold Plus, Citocalcium, Sugar Mover, Bioforge, Nitroplus, ... in their conventional or organic versions, have a special relevance in order to ensure the control and good management of the plantations as well as profitable and continuous productions.

Vicente Doménech

Product and Technical Manager

Stoller Europe