

A South African asparagus producer develops a new dehydrated product

Detail Introduction :

An asparagus-producing company has developed a dehydrated asparagus product to combat food waste. "There is a frightening figure, and that is that, in a year, we will throw away approximately 30 tons of asparagus considered 'waste' or non-marketable product for not meeting the requirements of large distribution", says Grahame Osler, sales manager, and marketing, one of the few asparagus growers in Africa.

"We have extensively tested with the Cape Peninsula University of Technology and can successfully dehydrate asparagus into a fine powder. This powder can be stored for up to twelve months and has a very good taste profile and nutritional analysis, so the value of the product, from a nutritional point of view, is still good.

Dried asparagus powder could be an ingredient for smoothies or a flavoring for soups, though Grahame says there may be more applications that haven't occurred to them yet.

Air transport restriction causes a shortage of imported asparagus.

"We have left behind the productive peak of October, recovering from the drop in production in November and now we are preparing for the Christmas commercial period. To cover the demand of large retailers during the holidays, we have planned to import some asparagus to supplement the local production for a few weeks in the production slump in November/December."

In the first hard confinement, demand fell. There was also much less supply last winter because imports were restricted. "Supply instability is affecting demand. Import prices have spiked as airfreight costs have risen abnormally, affecting retail price and demand."

Asparagus field in the eastern Free State

"From a production point of view, we are patiently waiting for the next pull so that we can serve more of our asparagus before Christmas."

Grahame says they planned to import white asparagus for South African demand. Still, there seemed to be less white asparagus production from their Central and South American growing partners.

"We also import purple asparagus and don't have a local plantation. We are finding that there is very little purple asparagus available around the world as well, so we haven't been able to import anything."

He says that airfare restrictions have posed some difficulties in importing, causing a lack of supply for demand.

Good season for growing asparagus

"We have focused on green asparagus only for local production this season. The demand for white asparagus has been very low overall in South Africa (relative to the demand for green asparagus), so we have not prepared for local production of white asparagus. The period of local production of these asparagus is short, while we can extend the production of green asparagus so that its cultivation is more profitable," explains Grahame Osler.

He maintains that it has been a good season for growing asparagus. "All our fields, including those of our grower partners from VKB's emerging farming cooperatives, have done well. The season was slightly delayed by about a week, but the warmer spring temperatures also brought the peak a little earlier in the season, towards the end of September and the first week of October. It has been a good season, with good rainfall, good sunlight, and very few strong winds. Right now, it shows that we are having a La Niña rains much more abundant, which is reducing production relative to expected harvest yields."