

Current status of sweet corn cultivation in France

Detail Introduction :

Nicolas Montepagano, responsible for the A.G.P.M. sector, provides an overview of sweet corn cultivation in France. Although the country is the leader in Europe, being the second-largest producer of sweet corn for industrial use and the first ex aequo for the production of canned food, French consumption remains low since more than 80% of production is destined for export. . Regarding the organic market, although the production of sweet corn has grown a lot in recent years, consumption, like that of the entire sector, is declining.

History of production in France

Corn has been cultivated for a long time, and its origins date back to South America, around 7,000 years ago. However, the first written mention of sweet corn is much more recent, dating back to 1801. The popularity and consumption of sweet corn first developed in North America, and the U.S. in particular, from 1860 (before the Civil War) and significantly from the 1930s. Sweet corn then developed in Europe from the 1970s, with France as a major player. Although the first productions took place in the central region and the southwest, the crop has its root in the country's southwest with the construction of the first factory in the Landes in 1975. The French market took off in the 1980s with the development of industrial tools until the mid-1990s.

Current production in France, mainly in the southwest

The production of sweet corn for industrial use (canned or frozen) in France continues to be located mainly in the southwest (94% in Nouvelle-Aquitaine and 6% in Occitanie), especially in the departments of Landes, Gironde, Lot et Garonne, Pyrenees Atlantic, Gers and, to a lesser extent, Dordogne, Pyrénées-Orientales and Garonne and Charente-Maritime.

The organic ratio in French production

The total area in 2021 was 22,120 ha, of which 1,480 were dedicated to organic production. The organic sweet corn area has developed strongly since 2016 and represents between 6 and 7% of the French production since 2017.

France represents 31% of the surface of the European Union

France is the second-largest producer of sweet corn for the industry in the E.U., after Hungary and ahead of Poland, Spain, and Italy. The country represents 31% of the E.U. surface and Hungary 45%. Some 750 producers cultivate these areas and are members of 5 producer groups in France.

The sweet corn industry in France

French production is processed in seven factories in France: four that only pack canned sweet corn, two that only pack frozen sweet corn, and one that packs both canned and frozen sweet corn. A part of the production is also processed in a factory in Spain but small volumes. The industrial facilities are located near the production areas.

plots to ensure that the harvests are tended to and packed as soon as possible. Packaging is generally less than 6 hours after harvest.

80% of French production is dedicated to preserves

French production is mainly oriented towards preserves. In total, for an average production of 180,000 tons of sweet corn in France (average 2019-2021), 80% of production is dedicated to canning.

France is the leader in the production of canned sweet corn in the E.U., together with Hungary. The production volumes of these two countries are similar and represented on average during the 2019-2021 period, 45% of the volumes of canned maize in the E.U. in the case of France and 37% of the volumes in the case of Hungary (Source A.E.T.M.D.: European Association of Sweet Corn Processors).

France: second producer of frozen sweet corn

France is the second-largest producer of frozen sweet corn in the E.U. after Hungary (in 2019-2021: France = 27% of the volume of frozen sweet corn in the E.U. and Hungary = 38%).

In addition to this corn production for industry, several hundred hectares are dedicated to fresh consumption, mainly through short distribution circuits. This production remains limited in France.

production cycle

The sowing of sweet corn extends over about 3 months, from the beginning of April to the beginning of July. The objective is to distribute the harvests and guarantee the proper functioning of industrial tools over the year. Harvests extend from mid-July to mid-October. The peculiarity of sweet corn is that it is harvested before full maturity after a production cycle of about 100 days.

French sweet corn markets are mainly export-oriented

The consumption of canned sweet corn remains limited in France, with less than 1 kg/inhabitant per year. On average, a Frenchman consumes about 600 g of canned sweet corn per year (consumption at home and in restaurants), which is equivalent to a 4/4 can (850 ml can). This format of preserves is rarely purchased in France. In fact, the formats of 1/2 (425 ml capacity) or 1/4 (212 ml capacity) are the most consumed.

The French production of sweet corn is mainly intended for export.