

Castilla La Mancha: an extensive and varied fruit and vegetable sector

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The large region of Castile-La Mancha forms part of the inland plateau known as the meseta castellana. The region's horticulture extends over large areas and is sometimes industrial in scale. Castile-La Mancha is essentially a wide plain, although it also embraces mountainous landscapes like the Cordillera Central (north), the Sistema Ibérico (northeast), and the Sierra Morena and the Montes de Toledo, to the south. Castile-La Mancha has three national parks and numerous sites of environmental interest.





The climate is Mediterranean tending to mild continental, with low rainfall, fairly low temperatures in winter and hot summers. Its very late spring frosts impose a constraint on the region's fruit output, but some areas with special microclimates, such as in Toledo province, are mild enough for fruit growing for local purposes.

The fruit and vegetable sector of Castile-La Mancha has been modernised only to a limited extent, and mostly does not use irrigation, but is nonetheless

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important at the national level. Major crops of the region include saffron, onion, aubergine, field mushroom, garlic, melon, vineyard and olive grove. These crops have deep roots in the community and sustain many rural jobs. In the past twelve years, the gradual introduction of irrigation technology has notably improved output, which in some instances has doubled. This process of change is clustered on the main aquifers of Albacete and Ciudad Real.

The protected names of Castile-La Mancha include the protected geographical indications (PGIs) Ajo Morado de las Pedroñeras (garlic), Berenjena de Almagro (aubergine) and Melón de la Mancha (melon). The recently created producer organisation Productores de Cebolla de Castilla La Mancha aims to register a new protected designation of origin (PDO), Cebolla de La Mancha.

The PGI Ajo Morado de las Pedroñeras is a native garlic variety chiefly grown in the Cuenca area of La Mancha, though lately it has spread to other provinces of the region, particularly Albacete. Besides its purple colour, the distinctive features of this garlic are its strong smell, its piquant taste and its medium size - each head comprises eight to ten crescent-shaped cloves of yellow-white flesh. The protected geographical indication Ajo Morado de las Pedroñeras was recognised in 2001; it covers garlic produced in 225 local districts of La Mancha, Mancha, Mancha Alta, Mancha Baja, Manchuela and Centro.





The PGI Berenjena de Almagro, recognised in 1995, covers a native aubergine variety bred by the local growers which has been cultivated here for time immemorial in the municipalities of Aldea del Rey, Almagro, Bolaños, Calzada de Calatrava, Granátula de Calatrava and Valenzuela de Calatrava in Ciudad Real province. The crop is harvested from July to November in several stages; the land is watered after every harvest stage. Almagro aubergine is available commercially in three forms: ready-dressed, stuffed with pepper paste and chopped.

Manchego melon is specially significant. Castile-La Mancha dedicates around 13,637 ha to melon cultivation, and accounts for 37% of national output and 35% of the surface area under cultivation for this crop. Melon is grown, processed and packaged in the natural district known as Mancha in the northeast of Ciudad Real province. May 2003 saw the creation of the Asociación para la promoción del Melón de La Mancha (La Mancha melon promotion society), an association of cooperatives which promoted the present protected geographical indication Melón de La Mancha. The Consejo Regulador (inspection body) grants the PGI label to melons of the Saccharinus variety of the native Piñonet or

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Piel de Sapo cultivars, whose distinctive feature is their oval shape. The peel can be smooth or slightly rough, with lengthwise marking of varying depth. The peel is mostly green, with uniformly distributed dark patches of middling size; the skin turns yellow as the melon ripens. The pulp is white, while the central seed cavity is orange.

Another standout crop is Azafrán de La Mancha (saffron), whose pink crocuses (popularly known as saffron 'roses') give the landscape a special touch of warmth and colour in October and November. The bulbous saffron plant is part of the region's historic and cultural heritage. Saffron spice is made of the stigmas of the saffron crocus. The Consejo Regulador covers saffron production in the manchego districts of Toledo, Cuenca, Ciudad Real and Albacete provinces.

La Mancha saffron has a very strong, exotic fragrance and a slightly bitter taste. These traits make it a wonderful flavouring that lends food a deep aroma. Saffron is indispensable to many Spanish recipes, particularly in manchego cookery.

A further important crop are the peppers grown to make pimentón dulce (sweet paprika); the most highly prized varieties are Ocal and Agridulce de la Vera.

Ligneous crops like vineyard and olive grove are enormously important in Castile-La Mancha. Both help form the backbone of the regional economy. The large surface area they cover and the size of the agricultural and service industries they support embrace over 2000 undertakings and 250 cooperatives that bring the population together in the major production areas.

Environmentally compatible farming is gaining ground year by year in Castile-La Mancha. The surface area given over to organic farming in the region accounted for 8% of the total for Spain in 2005. By crop, 14,000 hectares are dedicated to cereals and similar produce, 8,622 ha are given over to olive grove, and a little over 4,942 ha to vineyard. According to Ministry of Agriculture data for 2005, Castile-La Mancha was home to a total 76 organic farming businesses, particularly olive oil and wine producers.



Awards Grand selection

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Wine with
Castile-La Mancha D.O.



Manchego Cheese



La Mancha Saffron



Extra Virgin
Olive Oil from
Castile-La Mancha



Honey from
Castile-La Mancha



Grand Selection Awards:

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Wine with
Castile-La Mancha DO

Red wine over 3 years old and
kept in a cask for over a year

CASTILLO DE ALMANSA 2001

Monastrell - Syrah - Tempranillo - Tintorera
Bodegas Piqueras (D.O. Almansa)
ALMANSA (Albacete)
Tif.: 967 34 14 82

Manchego Cheese

Manchego Cheese
Industrial Cured

MONTESCUSA

Quesos Lominchar, S.L.
CORRAL DE ALMAGUER (Toledo)
Tif.: 925 207 246

Saffron

La Mancha Saffron

LA ROSERA

Bealar, S.L.
MOTILLA DEL PALANCAR (Cuenca)
Tif.: 969 180 156

Extra Virgin Olive Oil
from Castile-La Mancha

Extra Virgin Olive Oil
with Montes de Toledo DO

ARZUAGA

Ifama, S.L.
NOEZ (Toledo)
Tif.: 925 590 227

Honey from
Castile-La Mancha

Honey with
"Miel de La Alcarria" DO

MIEL DE TORRONTERAS

Romero
Miel de Torronteras
ESCAMILLA (Guadalajara)
Tif.: 949 82 70 91



Alimentos de Castilla-La Mancha



Castilla-La Mancha