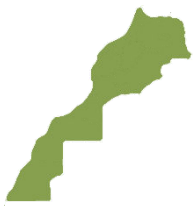


Farmers' organizations serving farmers and rural territories

Newsletter n°17 – January 2020

POST-HARVEST MANAGEMENT AND PRODUCT VALUATION, AN IMPORTANT CHALLENGE FOR FARMERS AND THEIR FO

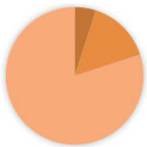
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The fruit growers of Sidi Ayad organize themselves to better value their apples

In February 2014, 265 farmers in the commune of Sidi Ayad (Rich) formed a cooperative. "3,000 tons of apples are harvested every year, but the production is of low quality, the picking, storage and transport conditions are poor, and the sales conditions are unfavorable:

- 80% of the apples are sold on trees at 0.15-0.40 €/kg
- 15% in the souk at 0.25-0.60 €/kg
- 5% to the middlemen, after storage, at 0.60-1 €/kg".



In order to overcome the difficulties in adding value to the apples, the cooperative has undertaken various projects:

- **the improvement of the production**, in quantity but also in quality, in order to (i) facilitate the preservation of apples and (ii) access to more remunerative markets.
- **the conservation of the apples** (refrigeration unit operational in 2021) so that the access to more profitable markets is given.
- **the transformation** into juice and vinegar (operational unit in 2021) to add value to lower quality apple.



In this context, the plastic **crate rental service** was launched in 2018. It contributes to the first two projects: fruit growers improve the quality of apples through better harvesting and transport practices as well as they negotiate better selling prices for part of their production by sorting apples; etc.

3,500 crates with a capacity of 20 kg were bought in 2018.

- 38 fruit growers rented the crates in 2018, for a turnover of €1,800 at the cooperative level.
- 35 fruit growers in 2019, for €2,500: the same box could be rented 2 months in a row to 2 different fruit growers.

After two campaigns of operation, a first assessment shows that the service is well managed and that fruit growers are satisfied. However, it affects only 4% of the production of the cooperative's members and therefore remains largely insufficient. Even if the cooperative finally decided to rent the crates only for apples (they could also be used for apricots and olives since the seasons are different), the revenue already generated allows the service to develop with the purchase of 1000 additional crates as of May 2020 (against 800 initially planned).

The current challenge is to invest in more crates to meet members demand and to equip the refrigeration unit with enough tool by the time it becomes operational (50,000 crates).



The farmers from Biyehmo and their levers for a better valorization of dates

In the village of Biyehmo, the annual production of dates is about 1,000 t divided into 3 varieties:



- 60% of Ahmat, a variety in high demand but with a very short shelf life (< 24h)
- 30% of Siwy, a variety that can be kept for a week outside and months in the refrigerator. Their value can double during the month of Ramadan
- 10% of Balady, a wild variety that is difficult to market

Farmers sell their dates individually to middlemen. In a context of increasing demand for good quality dates, they had the intuition to organize themselves and improve their income by:

- grouping their production and bypassing a link in the distribution chain
- sharing storage means to sell production during Ramadan
- creating new outlets for the sale of products derived from palm components

The Biyehmo association, accompanied by Fert and NSCE, requested a specific study to identify various opportunities to improve the income from date production and to assess their feasibility at the association level. The restitution workshop of the study organized at the end of 2019, was an opportunity to compare the work carried out by the consultants with the expectations of farmers and the leaders of the association.

Main findings and perspectives of farmers

Collectively marketing the production of association members is complex because:

- the implementation of high-quality control and sorting processes in order to sell at the right price and limit losses is difficult to organize internally
- many farmers are not ready to receive deferred payments

Making sustainable a refrigerator at the level of the association is unrealistic because:

- the operating costs are too high (maintenance, electricity, salaries, ...)
- the optimization of the space of the cold room requires an important rotation of the stock of dates, which is difficult to combine with the objective of the majority of farmers to sell during Ramadan



Given these constraints, the leaders of Biyehmo, together with Fert and NSCE, are thinking about other options in the short and medium term:

- **better sanitary protection of the palm trees**, by intensifying the fight against the red weevil, thanks in particular to the acquisition of a second endotherapy equipment.
- **better post-harvest management of dates**, by training farmers on the storage of the Siwy variety, including the use of quality baskets and appropriate buildings to limit losses
- the development of the **marketing of derivative products**, traditionally produced by women. The promotion of these products in fairs and tourist places could lead to orders that the association could respond to.

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