

Saffron – the king of spices

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Over the past few years, interest in saffron has been continuously growing and its admirers have been increasing. The first steps of saffron in our country were in 2015, when the pioneer in cultivating this exotic spice was Hasan Tahirov from the Rhodope region. The planted areas at that time amounted to 1,000 decares of demonstration fields in the Ruse region, Ludogorie, the Plovdiv region and the Kardzhali region, where farmers were trained in the proper cultivation of saffron.

After 4 years, more and more farmers in the Kardzhali region are replacing their main livelihood – tobacco production – with the expensive spice. While at the beginning the farmers who turned to the saffron business were only 15, today they number 45 and their number continues to grow. One of the reasons for the enormous interest in this spice is its relatively easy cultivation and the expansion of the areas. Saffron is similar to the

crocus known in our lands; it lies dormant during the summer and blooms in October. The flowers, which are of interest to the industry, are harvested at the beginning of November, and from them the stigmas, which are the final product, are separated. At the same time, tobacco requires care from March until the end of December. Demand on the world market is also increasing and the members of the Bulgarian National Association of Producers of Saffron and Organic Saffron Products aim to export not only raw material, but also finished products in the form of tea, biscuits, beverages, baby food and creams.

By the end of January 2020, two exchanges in Plovdiv and Burgas for the purchase of the valuable spice are expected to open their doors. The current purchase price of saffron of good quality in our country is between 8 and 10 leva per gram.

In the spring of 2019, an agreement was also signed with China, under which, over three years, Bulgaria must export a total of 640 tonnes of bulbs worth 6.5 million euro. In support of cooperation in agricultural commodities under the 16+1 initiative between China and the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), work is underway on the establishment of a centre for the development of saffron near Plovdiv, which will support farmers with training, seminars and expertise in the proper production of bulbs from the saffron crocus.

The Centre for the Promotion of Cooperation in the Field of Agriculture between China and the Countries of Central and Eastern Europe will officially also coordinate the creation of a list/register of all Bulgarian companies that have expressed a wish to export saffron to China. In connection with the import requirements of China, the General Administration of Customs of the PRC has sent to the Bulgarian Food Safety Agency (BFSA) a questionnaire for risk analysis. Only approved establishments and producers, for whom the BFSA guarantees to the Chinese authorities that they comply with all hygiene rules under the legislation and meet the agreed export conditions, will be allowed to export to China. These are the conditions for exporting saffron and saffron bulbs:

- Name of the company

- Address (postal code, town/city, municipality, district, country)

- UIC number/BULSTAT

- Contact person (Name, Mobile, Telephone, Email)

- Type of agricultural production

- Information on their processing establishments

