

Фито Терра or how the production of processing tomatoes in Bulgaria can turn into a passion

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We speak with Teodora Taseva, owner of Fitto Terra, about Bulgaria's place in tomato production, about the processing enterprises that are increasingly turning to Bulgarian raw materials, and about the choice and passion to begin and end every day with His Majesty – the tomato!

Do you consider Bulgaria a major tomato-producing country and which are the varieties that distinguish us?

For a long time Bulgaria was considered a small country. But as a member of the European Union, and compared with some other countries, it turns out that it is not so small, neither in terms of territory nor in terms of

tomato production. It is well known on the map of Europe and beyond. One of the products that distinguishes us is the tasty Bulgarian tomato. Pink, Oxheart, Pink Magic or simply garden tomato – the tomato has become our trusted ally when choosing what to put on the traditional table. Globally, Bulgaria is known not only for creating the first hybrid varieties, but also for its breeding of tasty fruits, which is due to the creation and selection of diverse hybrid varieties and their development, as well as to the country's climatic and agronomic conditions.

Do you know when tomato cultivation began in Bulgaria?

The first data on tomato production in Bulgaria date back to around 1890 in Kurtovo Konare. According to records, they were brought by Alexander Dimitrov from Constantinople. In the beginning, their cultivation was amateur, but gradually they began to be grown throughout the country. Bulgaria was one of the first countries in the world in tomato cultivation and processing. Unfortunately, with the political changes that occurred in the 1990s, changes also took place in this sector. Enterprises were gradually closed down and the areas were neglected. Thus, from an agrarian leader in the tomato sector – production and processing – Bulgaria turned into an importer of raw materials, not only of tomatoes, but also of many other fruits and vegetables.

After 2010, a process of revival began again in the cultivation of tasty Bulgarian tomatoes and of various other types of vegetables and fruits. The main region that once again became a leader in the industrial cultivation of tomatoes is around the cities of Pazardzhik, Plovdiv and Stara Zagora. Tomatoes are also grown in Northern Bulgaria, in the Pleven region and even as far as Kavarna, mainly for the needs of processing enterprises, which prefer to process and buy Bulgarian raw materials instead of imported ones. Thus, in addition to creating more jobs in the sector of industrial tomato cultivation, more opportunities are being developed for the processing industry, which in turn leads to more choice for the end consumer, as well as considerable opportunities for foreign markets to taste and buy fresh or canned Bulgarian products.

Our team at Fitto Terra is often a guest at various processing enterprises that exercise strict control both over compliance with hygiene and production practices and over tomato cultivation. More and more enterprises are starting to take care of their own vegetable gardens. Some fully cover their needs from their own gardens and fields. Others – partially. Regardless of whether the raw materials are their own, leased or purchased from agricultural producers, of essential importance are the types of fertilizers used in their cultivation, as well as compliance with all agronomic practices in the field.

George Sandros: “Our vision of a successful business is based on care from the seed to the rich harvest”

In Bulgaria, more and more enterprises are relying on pure Bulgarian raw materials and good hygiene and commercial practices in their production facilities. It is precisely in drawing up the agronomic calendar regarding activities for the cultivation of raw materials for the enterprises, and in monitoring its implementation, that we at Fitto Terra have specialized. Our agronomists, with many years of experience that we bring from Greece, together with our partner there D Sandros SA – the official representative for Eastern Europe of seeds for industrial tomatoes HEINZ and the pure, microorganism-rich fertilizers of the Spanish leader Atlantica Agricola – are together with the farmers in the field every day to monitor the entire process of application and cultivation of the production, providing valuable advice and professional guidance. We strive not only for a rich, but also for a clean harvest.

How do Bulgarian farmers grow tomatoes? By traditional practices or are innovations already entering our agriculture?

Bulgarian farmers grow their fruits and vegetables in a very modern way. In most cases, they use methodologies directly from abroad, as in our case at Fitto Terra – applying them in the fields in Bulgaria. As an example, I can mention the farmers we work with. The fields are equipped with drip irrigation, they are mechanically cultivated with machinery, transplanting is done with seedling-planting machines and, depending on their type, the production is harvested with specialized combines. Throughout the process, protocols for agrotechnical activities are implemented and strict control is exercised over the sequence of fertilizers applied to the soil for feeding the crops and the plant protection products used. They work together and visit colleagues abroad for exchange of experience in countries such as Greece, Italy and the USA.



With the delivery of seedlings for Heinz industrial tomatoes, the real work in the field begins. In addition to the delivered variety, the vigour of the plant is checked. It must not be too small, but well-grown, strong and with an intense green colour.

Does this mean that in Bulgaria, besides a variety of cultivars, there is now also segmentation according to market needs?

Of course! A distinction has begun to be made between table tomatoes and processing tomatoes. Consumers, farmers and processors alike are extremely careful in their choice of varieties.

For the processing industry, with the seed varieties and seedling material of the leader HEINZ that we at Fitto Terra offer, I can confidently state that tomato varieties are selected even according to the final product for which they are intended. Depending on whether the enterprise will produce passata, ketchup or tomato paste, it selects and contracts with producers who, in turn, will rely on specific varieties to grow them exclusively and solely for the needs of the enterprise, in order to obtain an excellent final product.

Fitto Terra – challenges and fulfilment in the production of tomatoes for processing

Here I would add and share that the food industry in Bulgaria is even moving far ahead in time. For years it has been united in the Union of Fruit and Vegetable Processors – UFVP – and recently the idea has matured to establish an Association of Traditional Bulgarian Preserves – ATBP. As we work in close cooperation both with the well-established over the years UFVP and with the members of the newly established ATBP, we see that the need is being recognized to deepen traditions in Bulgarian production with modern technologies. ATBP is even ambitious to protect products with such designation in the EU. Thus, foods with a traditional and regional character will become even more recognizable on foreign markets, and our producers and processors will be sought after for the cultivation and production of tasty final products.



Every stage of plant development must be checked. Field inspections begin early in the morning.



You sound enthusiastic?

I do not just sound, I am truly enthusiastic and proud of the fact that I have the opportunity to work with real professionals. I am happy that I have walked the path from sowing each tomato seed, growing it into a seedling, transplanting the seedling material, through harvesting the crop, to processing it in the enterprises and launching it on the retail networks. Not a single step in this process is unfamiliar to me. But only in this way can such hard work be successfully managed, involving many people and destinies, engineering thought and commercial skills.



Mechanized harvesting of industrial tomato crops

The tomato is present in every single day of my life. For me, and for my colleagues at Fitto Terra, it is not only work, but also life and passion.

Naturally, there are many difficulties, as we do not control the weather and are sometimes exposed to very aggressive climatic conditions, as well as to pest attacks. We also have to cope with the increasing requirements from the control authorities. But with love for what we do and with a lot of hard work, I believe that all together, with joint efforts, we are creating the prerequisites for the development of this sector.

Let us conclude with a few words about the future and the prospects for Bulgaria in this sector

Bulgaria has a huge advantage over our neighbours and other agricultural producers – we have excellent natural conditions. Now, as an EU member, we also benefit from the fast and easy cross-border deliveries of our production, which is of great importance, and we have a strategic geographical location.



Last but not least, I can confidently state that Bulgarian agricultural producers rely on world leaders in organic fertilization and thus not only comply with the recommendations of the European Union for green and clean agriculture, but also offer production grown in full conformity with European standards – a goal which Fitto Terra also pursues. This ranks Bulgaria among the best tomato producers – table, greenhouse (let us not forget this segment either) and industrial – extensively in open fields. At the same time, thanks to our good soils and favourable climatic conditions, as I have mentioned more than once, our production is fresh and extremely tasty.

For more information and details, we will visit you on site. Call us!

The Fitto Terra team is expecting you!

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