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High-oleic sunflowers – a good opportunity for security and increased return on investment

Автор(и): syngenta, България
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A Conversation with Mr. Anton Iliev, High-Oleic Sunflower Expert at Syngenta Bulgaria EOOD

Mr. Iliev, over the last few years, high-oleic sunflowers have entered Bulgaria and have become a permanent fixture in the fields of Bulgarian agricultural producers. In your opinion, what is the reason for this?

This is indeed a fact. For several years now, we have seen a gradual increase in the acreage of high-oleic sunflower in Bulgaria, and everything indicates that this trend will continue. This is primarily due to the better return on investment per unit area compared to conventional sunflower and the increased demand from leading companies in the food industry.

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Could we say that high-oleic sunflowers are a novelty in agriculture?

In fact, high-oleic sunflowers are not a novelty at all. The first varieties were created back in the 1970s in the USSR, and since then, there has been extremely targeted work on their development, with significant achievements in improving the quality and genetic potential of this type of sunflower over the last 10 years. In the past, there were a number of factors that limited farmers from growing it, such as lower yields and the need for significant isolation from linoleic sunflower. However, that is now in the past - with the latest generations of high-oleic hybrids, these obstacles have been overcome – yield and oil content are at the level of linoleic hybrids. Some of the new hybrids are even better than the linoleic ones; for example, Syngenta's Experto and Talento hybrids are tolerant to all races of downy mildew and broomrape – these are qualities possessed only by the newest products from leading seed companies.

What ultimately distinguishes high-oleic sunflower from the ordinary, linoleic one?

What actually distinguishes high-oleic sunflower is precisely the high content of oleic acid – this makes it an extremely healthy product, very similar to olive oil, but at the same time more stable and resistant to both low and high temperatures. Last but not least, it is also more cost-effective for end consumers.

And what are the specifics of its cultivation?

There is nothing complicated about the production of high-oleic sunflower itself. The agronomic practices are absolutely identical to those of any sunflower. The difference comes from the recommended isolation of 150m from adjacent linoleic fields. However, if this isolation is not possible, farmers should not worry – during the sunflower harvest, the edges of the field are harvested separately, and the yield is separated from the main quantity of high-oleic sunflower. In 2016, with Syngenta's hybrids, there was not a single case where the oleic acid content fell below the required minimum of 82%. Something that requires serious attention is that the machinery must be thoroughly cleaned beforehand, and then care must be taken to avoid physical mixing with linoleic sunflower during transport and storage.

You mentioned that with high-oleic sunflower, agricultural producers have more security and a better return. Could you explain what you mean?

In 2016, Syngenta created the "Advantage" program, which is entirely aimed at assisting agricultural producers in growing high-oleic sunflower and achieving excellent results. Subsequently, a market for the produce is also secured through Syngenta's partners - Bulgarian oil producers and the Spanish vegetable oil refinery Lipidos Santiga.

The security in producing high-oleic sunflower comes from the fact that every agricultural producer who joins has the opportunity to sign a three-year agreement with a **fixed premium,** meaning that even if something happens to the premium in the next two years, participants in the program will

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not be affected. Additionally, they receive **guaranteed purchase of the produce** through Syngenta's partners and a **guarantee of a minimum of 82%** oleic acid. At this moment, there is no other company on the market that can offer such guarantees.

And regarding the better return, it is due to the guaranteed purchase price at market levels, the fixed premium above the sunflower price for a period of three years, and the discounts from Syngenta for the seeds and crop protection products included in the high-oleic sunflower technology.

Am I correct in understanding that the program has already launched and is operating on the Bulgarian market?

Exactly, in 2016 we have 41 agricultural producers who are already participating in the program. A number of events were organized: training sessions at various locations in the country, field demonstration days, open harvests, trips abroad for experience exchange, individual visits, etc. Participants in the "Advantage" program benefited from all the positives it offers – this year the fixed premium for high-oleic sunflower was 50 BGN, and we will announce the premium for 2017 in a few days.

What are your plans for 2017, will you continue the activities this year as well?

Of course! All these initiatives continue in 2017 as well, and within a few days we will announce the full terms of the program. Our idea is to give an even larger number of agricultural producers the opportunity to earn more and take advantage of all the benefits we have prepared for them. In the long term, Syngenta will continue to invest in the development of new high-oleic hybrids, with the ambition for Bulgaria to become a leading and sustainable supplier of high-oleic oil for Western Europe, specifically for Spain. /***RZ***/

You can see all high-oleic hybrids from Syngenta Bulgaria EOOD **HERE**