



Alegra's kiwiverse: nurturing nature's goodness

Italy's largest kiwifruit marketer supports its growers with investment in R&D to ensure its supply base remains sustainable and profitable.

Italian kiwifruit has its roots in Emilia Romagna, where fruit company Alegra is based. This is where kiwifruit cultivation started in Italy in the 1970s, and over the years it has become one of the most suitable areas in the Northern Hemisphere. From here, Alegra's kiwifruit reach the four corners of the world.

Today, Alegra's members produce 45,000 tonnes of kiwifruit per year, a figure that places the company among the biggest players in the national and international market.

Naturally, many things have changed since it all began. Nowadays, more than ever, in

an ever-changing scenario and amid increased competition from other countries, it is always vital to be ready to face the constant changes in the market and in consumer tastes. It is also essential to be prepared to confront challenges that climate change brings, and to remain focused on our goal to deliver sustainable development throughout all our activities.

That is why Alegra supports the sound agronomic expertise of our associate growers with a constant commitment in the name of innovation, all along the supply chain from orchard to table. And it is right there in the orchard that innovation

plays a key role to help achieve an increasingly sustainable agriculture.

For example, the ultra-low pressure drip system of micro-irrigation enables our growers to reduce water usage by one-third and to cut the energy used during irrigation by 70 per cent. Furthermore, we have implemented sensors that detect the needs of each tree and release the exact amount of water only when and where is necessary.

Just to give you an idea, in a 3ha kiwifruit orchard, this translates into a saving of about 5,000 cubic metres of water, the equivalent of two Olympic swimming pools, per year.

ABOVE—Kiwifruit production in the northern Italian region of Emilia Romagna
OPPOSITE TOP—The Alegra brand is well known in the European kiwifruit business
OPPOSITE BELOW—New systems have been added to help tackle the challenges of hail and frost

Over the last few years, out-of-season spring frosts have affected our orchards heavily. As this is becoming a new pattern, we could not just sit and wait for better times. We had to find new active frost protection methods for our kiwifruit production.

So, as well as introducing anti-frost installations over and under the tree foliage, most of our growers have installed anti-frost wind machines. These help to create a large mass of relatively warm air, which helps to bring the temperature in the orchard area above the critical level.

GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY

Innovation also means research to develop new varieties. Alegra's production started with green kiwifruit, but over the years the taste of gold kiwifruit has started to win over consumers with its sweetness. More recently, a new red variety with a sweet and exotic taste has been introduced as part of our product range.

The latest addition is a new green kiwifruit variety with a very high Brix value. Part of a club project established four years ago, it offers a perfectly balanced taste with every bite. At the moment, the volumes available do not allow it to be sold globally, but commercial tests suggest a very positive outcome: over 80 per cent of those who have tried this new green kiwifruit were impressed by both its taste and texture and went on to buy it.

Innovation is also crucial in postharvest processes. In its packhouses, Alegra carries out constant research and invests in state-of-the-art technology for its kiwifruit sizing, selection, coldstorage and packaging. This is all to improve the efficiency of the product cycle up to the point of sale, and Alegra recently introduced new ERP software (SAP) so that every department in the company can access and share its data. ●

