



Interpera 2025 - workforce, climate change, consumption: the European pear sector in search of solutions

At today's Interpera conference, pear industry experts discussed a number of common concerns on present and the future of the sector. Many challenges are to be faced, including labour difficulties, the need to adapt farming practices in the face of phytosanitary restrictions, and water management. There is also the important issue of declining consumption, particularly among young people.

Jo Brouns, Flemish Minister of Agriculture launched the Interpera congress praising the resilience of the pear sector, and reaffirming the importance of its three pillars: research and innovation, promotion and international cooperation.

Like every year, representatives from the six main pear-producing countries - Belgium, Spain, France, Italy, the Netherlands and Portugal - gave a detailed account of the past season. On the whole, it was satisfactory for most countries, despite persistent obstacles that are increasingly complicating production conditions:

- **Orchard protection**, undermined by the loss of certain active molecules with no effective alternatives to replace them and fight the increasing number of diseases and pests.
- The cost of **labour**, and its lack of availability, hence the sector's growing interest in robotisation.
- **Water management**, which raises major concerns; indeed storage remains insufficient despite rainy spells, making availability irregular and difficult to anticipate.
- Falling **consumption**, particularly among young people. The attractiveness of the pear needs to be rethought to attract new consumers.

At the second round table of the day, the six main producing countries shared their **crop forecasts for the 2024-2025 season**. The following estimates should be treated with caution, as the season has not yet fully revealed its potential:

- **Spain**: estimated production increase of 31% compared to 2024, when production potential was not reached.
- **Belgium**: a 25% increase is forecast, following a downturn in the previous campaign.
- **Portugal**: volumes broadly stable compared to last year.
- **France**: expected to fall by 9%, but an increase in acreage and the arrival of new varieties should be noted.
- **Italy**: a possible increase, but to be confirmed later in the season, as the main Italian varieties are harvested late.
- **Netherlands**: initial trends point to a probable increase, following a 10% drop in the previous season.

Later in the morning Dany Bylemans, Managing Director of PCfruit, presented the work of Eufri's 'Digital Orchards' working group, highlighting innovations such as the creation of twin

digital orchards to simulate parameters, scenarios and constraints, as well as the potential of agrivoltaics.

Presentations by Kris Jans (BelOrta) and Filip Fontaine (VLAMS) detailed consumer profiles and buying habits, highlighting **the fall in pear consumption** over the last 20 years. Examples of good practices in marketing and promotion were presented to suggest ways of boosting consumption.

The afternoon's technical sessions explored a number of key issues for the future of pear production. Ann Schenk, project manager at the VCBT, gave an overview of **post-harvest research**, highlighting advances in fruit conservation and quality. Precise cultivation was also at the heart of the discussions, with a presentation by Peter Frans De Jong (Wageningen University), who illustrated how to move from the macro to the micro for **fine management at tree level**. Sanitary issues were also addressed: Gianfranco Anfora (University of Trento) gave a comprehensive overview of the fight against stink bugs, while Tim Beliën (PCfruit) explained how **modelling** can improve the positioning of control strategies against pear suckers. These presentations highlighted the research currently underway and its potential for practical application in the field.

Faced with these climatic, economic and technical challenges discussed at Interpera, Luc Vanoirbeek, General Secretary of the VBT, and Lisa Martini, Vice-President of the AREFLH, agree that *"the need to get together, share ideas and innovate together has never been greater. That's the spirit of Interpera."*

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The organisers



AREFLH

The mission of the Assembly of European Horticultural Regions is to represent and defend the interests of its members (regions and associations of fruit and vegetable producer organisations) in dealings with the European institutions.

The Interpera congress, an itinerant event, has been co-organised since 2008 by AREFLH and a local partner from a pear-producing country.

www.areflh.org



VBT

VBT (Verbond van Belgische Tuinbouwcoöperaties), the Association of Belgian Horticultural Co-operatives, represents and defends the interests of Belgian producer co-operatives in the fruit and vegetable sector, both nationally and internationally.

VBT has six members, who together achieved sales of over €1.41 billion in 2024, including €135 million for pears.

www.vbt.eu

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