

# Nadalini sings praises of Mantova melons

Melons grown in the northern Italian province of Mantova stand a good chance of becoming the first such fruit to be granted PGI certification during the next few years, something local producer Nadalini would welcome

**I**TALIAN melon specialist Azienda Ortofrutticola Nadalini produces around 4,000 tonnes of various melon varieties on around 150ha of land located in the province of Mantova, just south of Verona, where melon production has a long and proud history stretching as far back, some say, as the fifteenth century. It is hoped that, before long, the distinctive melons grown in the region will be granted PGI status by the European Union. This is a goal shared by Nadalini, which is a member of the *Consorzio Melone Tipico Mantovano*, established in order to promote and protect the fruit.

Nadalini's main melon varieties include Harper, Tazio, Honey Moon, Bacir, Giusto and Dalton, but this year the company is set to extend its range with the introduction of a new variety called Talento, which, according to commercial manager Roberto Nadalini, will be regarded as one of the best melons available on the Italian market. "The Talento is similar to the Macigno melon," he says. "It displays superior flesh consistency, uniformity of size, finer skin markings and a smaller stalk."

With around 60 per cent of its production under cover and the remainder in open fields, Nadalini has for many years been a key supplier of high-quality melons to many of Italy's local fresh produce markets, covering much of northern Italy and stretching as far down as Florence, Rome and Fondi. However, the company has also managed to develop a significant export portfolio in recent times, with around 20 per cent of its production exported either directly or via a third party distributor to countries such as Austria, Switzerland, Croatia, the Netherlands, Denmark and the UK.

From the middle of this year, Nadalini will also be able to offer EurepGAP-certified products. "The application of the EurepGAP protocol is intended to bring about a noticeable and continued improvement in the company's production standards in the medium to long term, particularly in terms of sustainability, the environment, health and hygiene standards and worker safety," says Mr Nadalini.

Other checks on the quality of Nadalini's production are also well established. The utilisation of integrated pest management techniques has, says Mr Nadalini, helped the



Nadalini grows around 40 per cent of its melons in open fields

company to produce fruit that is healthy and safe while respecting the environment. "The guidelines we use encourage, where possible, the use of growing practices that have a reduced or minimal environmental impact," he says. "Regular analysis of the fruit is also carried out in order to ensure the limits of the law are being observed and, in the last few years, our maximum residue levels have been negligible."

With a view to improving traceability, meanwhile, the firm recently introduced a new barcoding system that ensures all of the relevant information regarding production, storage and distribution remains with each product along the supply chain. Such traceability is essential, comments Mr Nadalini. "The system allows us to manage logistics at our 1,400m<sup>2</sup> packhouse and in our 350m<sup>3</sup> coldstorage room," he points out. "At our clients' request, we

can provide a barcode reader which will show all the relevant information and enable them to integrate it into their own system."

The company has also made a recent investment in non-invasive infra-red technology designed to measure the sugar content of melons. "The sugar level of each individual melon is measured by the machine, which is extremely accurate, and only those that are over 12° brix are allowed on the market," explains Mr Nadalini. "In 2005, the sugar content of over 90 per cent of our melon production was over 13° brix." ■

