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European lemon, an example of sustainability at every level



Madrid (ots) -

- In addition to growing a natural product with healthy properties, European lemon growers have given this citrus fruit added value through environmental sustainability.
- The lemon sector in Europe has proven to be a good ally against global warming, capturing 360,550 tons of CO₂ per year, and a reference in water use and management.

Food sustainability is becoming an increasingly important part of the consumer's purchasing decision. The last eight years have been the warmest on the planet since modern temperature records began, according to NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies (GISS). Periods of drought, such as the one experienced by the West Coast states, are also more common. As a result, the European lemon industry has been focused on improving its sustainability and environmental impact for several decades now.

Thanks to various projects carried out by European producers, **lemons have been proved to be a good ally in the fight against climate change**. For example, in Spain the sector captures 360,550 tons of CO₂ per year, a figure equivalent to the pollution caused by 140,000 diesel cars driving 20,000 km. This is due to the fact that its Mediterranean coastline has a lemon tree forest of more than 15 million specimens, **with each tree absorbing some 26.6 kg of CO₂ per year**.

The fixation of greenhouse gases results from the techniques applied in the production of this citrus fruit. Thus, the **increase in organic acreage** since 2012 has helped to reinforce CO₂ capture. "Apart from that, this type of crop comes from an **agriculture that preserves and protects biodiversity**, by encouraging the planting of plant species and eliminating synthetic products that affect both the fauna surrounding the farms and the food chain," says José Antonio García, director of the **Interprofessional Association of Lemon and Grapefruit of Spain (AILIMPO)**.

In addition, **the European lemon sector is a reference in water use and management**, since it has managed to increase productivity in the last 30 years by 274% in farms while reducing its **water footprint** by 39% to **271 m³/t**. This is well below other fruits such as avocados (600 m³/t), bananas (790 m³/t) or peaches (910 m³/t) produced in Europe.

The water footprint is an indicator of the use of fresh water to obtain a product or service, which considers **direct and indirect consumption throughout the supply process**. For this, three factors are taken into account: the blue water footprint, which is the water extracted from surface water and groundwater; the green footprint, derived from the rainfall assimilated by the crops themselves in the field; and the gray water footprint, which corresponds to the water used to avoid altering the blue water.

Economic and social sustainability

But the sustainability of lemon produced in Europe is not only aimed at the environmental sphere, but also encompasses the other

two aspects involved in this concept, i.e., economic and social.

In this way, the sector relies on model contracts with the aim of **generating maximum value** for all its members, considering market conditions and economic justice, which also influence the community of which they are a part of. Likewise, it has an impact on **social sustainability**, which has to do with key aspects such as human resources management, occupational health and safety, training and labor development of workers.

These characteristics of the lemon with European origin are disseminated by **AILIMPO** in the information campaign **Welcome to the Lemon Age**, with the support of the European Union, with the aim of promoting its consumption among the new generations of U.S. and Canadian consumers; and that they value and appreciate more differentiating properties, for example, its **quality, freshness, sustainability, traceability and food safety** compared to non-EU lemons.

About AILIMPO

AILIMPO is a Spanish interprofessional, based in Murcia, officially recognized by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food of Spain and the European Commission, which represents the economic interests of producers, cooperatives, exporters and the industry of lemon and grapefruit. A sector in which Spain is the world leader in fresh exports and ranks second as a processing country, with an annual turnover of 700 million euros, generating 20,000 direct jobs and transferring more than 250 million euros to ancillary industries.

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