

OUR NEWS :

Hello everyone, here is our Newsletter N°7 for October and November 2010

This month we are introducing you to producers of plums (d'Ente) in conversion, grapes and onions, who share with us their passion for their production.

On 28th and 29th Septmeber, 5 Biogaronne producers visited Hollande for Béjo's Open Days. This company has a wide range of organic seeds. Yannick Chevray, Administration Manager for Béjo France, introduced us to his company.

Didier, Guillaume, Stéphane, Jean Pierre and Edgar also visited Dutch organic farmers and Vitalis, a company which also specialises in organic seeds, but I'll talk to you about that in more detail in the next newsletter

Enjoy your readingtalk to you soon
Best regards, Jean Luc



INTRODUCING YOU TO BÉJO:

« Béjo is a company solely concentrated on the selection, production, and sales of vegetable seeds for professional use in open field cultivation.

Béjo was founded in 1978, when two family businesses merged; Beemsterboer (1912) and Jong (1899). Béjo now has a large range of species and varieties and has gone international with 21 branches and numerous distributors in over 100 countries.

This company, with 650 employees throughout the world, retains the human touch and is solely motivated by



its slogan «Béjo, a name which means quality».

Béjo's range is established in Holland, Italy, Poland, Guatemala and India. Cultivation takes place in the best climatic zones in the world, including France, Italy, the States, Australia and many other regions.

Béjo continues to make massive investments in the production and marketing of organic seeds.

Innovators of the hot water treatment to rid the seeds of the major pathogens, we put in place le SVC (Steam Vacuum Cleaner) to obtain even better results by eliminating the humidity linked to the process.

Add to this varietal development centred on natural resistance, as for the Hylander FI variety, an onion which resists mildew, which won us the silver Sival 2010.

Béjo offers nearly 140 varieties in over 30 different species for organic farming.



PRODUCTION PLANNING :

Products	October/November	Products	October/November
Dry Garlic	5 à 10 t	Lettuces	
Aubergine	5 à 8 t	<i>Batavia, Oak leaf, round, cos, little gems, ...</i>	150 à 200 Palets
Swiss Chard	5 à 8 t	Vine Tomatoes	25 t
Pleurotte Mushrooms	2 t	Round Tomatoes	20 t
Chinese Cabbage	40 t	Raspberries	3 à 4 t
Smooth Red and Green cabbage	10 t	Prunes mi-cuit in Conversion	3 à 4 t
Butternut Squash	35 t	Kaki Fruit in Conversion	10 t
Musquée Squash	35 t	Chestnuts from Périgord	25 à 35 t
Custard Marrow	10 t	Dry Walnuts	30 t
Autumn Courgette	60 à 80 t	Grapes	
Spinach	5 à 10 t	<i>Chasselas AOC Moissac</i>	8 t
Fennel	15 à 20 t	<i>Seedless Exalta</i>	30 à 40 t
Fine Green Beans and Flat	5 à 8 t	<i>Alphonse Lavallée</i>	20 à 25 t
Red and Yellow Onions	50 t	<i>Muscat de Hamburg</i>	30 à 40 t
Leeks (end October)	20 à 30 t	<i>Ribol</i>	40 à 45 t
Potatoes		Kiwi (End November)	40 à 50 t
<i>Coquine, Charlotte, Ditta Désiré, Nicola...</i>	70 t	Pears : William and Conference	10 t
Capsicum	5 à 8 t	Apples	
Flat Parsley	20 000 Bunches	<i>Pilot, Pinova Corail, Dalinette et Pitchounette...</i>	50 à 80 t
Potimarron small pumpkins	35 à 40 t		



THE PRODUCERS :



Laurent and Stéphane Gers

« Our land has been organic for over 40 years. It was Laurent's father and uncle who converted in 1967. We now cultivate nearly 275 hectares of cereals: soya for human consumption, maize for popcorn, horse beans, oats, barley and wheat.

Yellow onions represent 5 hectares, about 80 tons, which we've been growing since 1998.

There is half an acre each of shallots and garlic, which we tried this year in small quantity for the first time, in response to market demands. Laurent is convinced, as in his family they've been organic from father to son.

Stephanie has moved towards organic because for her it's healthy, it doesn't use chemicals and the cereal seeds are not coated.

'I'm proud when I see our harvest despite all the weeds, I love to see the birds of prey above our land, this means that the animal cycle is working on our land and our land is alive.'

For our onion cultivation we buy the sets from "Béjo", which are then planted in seed trays at the beginning of January. In the winter and at the beginning of spring we have to use the comb harrow to get rid of the weeds, and then dig over two or three times mechanically and once manually if necessary. Sometimes we have to irrigate depending on the weather.

At the end of August, two or three days before lifting, we break the leaves, which make the onions cleaner and ensures they store better over the winter. When only the bulb is left on the surface of the soil, they are lifted then we leave the onions for a week in the field to begin drying in the sun.

The onions are then gathered in and stored flat in the warehouse on grating with ventilation shafts in order to finish off the drying and to avoid losses due to moisture. If the onions are not damaged during lifting, they will store well. However, when it freezes in winter, they mustn't be moved or calibrated as it will damage them and affect the quality.

At the end of September, calibrating, packaging and marketing can commence. We work mostly with Biogaronne because we have known Jean-Luc for 10 years now. And also this organization knows how to put themselves in the place of the producers, we are respected for our work and we are guaranteed to sell on quickly the best part of our harvest, for us that's important."

Nicole Alain and Cédric Lot et Garonne

« My wife and I have been established as farmers for thirty years or so. We took over my parents' land; in times gone by there were a lot of vines on the slopes, up to 100 hectares of vines, primarily Chasselas. Under the covered market at Prayssas in the fifties and sixties, when I went with my father, I remember seeing over a hundred traders selling their own dessert grapes. None of this exists any more, as most of the producers have dug up their vines.

Our land is on slopes that are not irrigated, where the good sunny aspect favours the cultivation and flavour quality of our grapes.

So we have 2 hectares of dessert grapes which we have been farming organically since 2002 : Chasselas, Alphonse Lavallé, Muscat and Ribol. I stopped using weed killers over 15 years ago. We went over to organic because the price being paid in conventional farming to the producers was not worth it, we nearly pulled out our vines, like many others, but Lydie Paul, a competent organic technician, persuaded us to convert to organic, and we have no regrets.

We also rear 45 dairy cows, and 45 sows, and we grow cereals for the animals' consumption. This breeding is not organic because the big problem is getting the milk collected, as this network is not really set up in our department.

We also have ½ hectare in organic plums d'Ente which are sold as prunes through Lou Prunel and ½ hectare of greengages for Biogaronne. Apart from the plums d'Ente, all our produce is sold by Biogaronne. I attach great importance to human relations as for me it is important to have total confidence between the buyers and the producers.

What is more, we don't stock our grapes, they are delivered to Biogaronne the day after being picked, and it is important to us to be able to sell large quantities of fresh produce regularly.



The grape is a noble fruit, it is fragile and must be picked, cut and packed with care. It is one of the rare fruit, which is picked ripe and which can stay on the vine for a fortnight without spoiling, on the contrary, it gains in sugar content during this time and the sun rays improve their colour.

Our son Cédric, who is 26, joined us in the business in April. It is a comfort to us to know that the farm will be taken over.”



**Aline and Marc
Lot et Garonne**

« Our 65 hectares of agricultural land are used as follows :
In first year of conversion : 3,000m² of cherry trees under cold shelter
In second year of conversion : 50 hectares of cereals, soya, wheat, triticale and alfalfa dried for animal feed and also 4 hectares of Plums (d’Ente). In addition I’ve planted 1 1/2 hectares of Plum trees (d’Ente) which will be in full production in five to six years. It is the variety called d’Ente which is turned into prunes. Being in Lot et Garonne we are able to call them “Pruneaux d’Agen” recognizable from the I.G.P. sign, a Protected Geographic Identity which guarantees the source of production. The harvest takes place from 15th August, when the

sugar count reaches 21°Brix.

Vibrators shake the trees and the plums fall into a plastic sheet in the form of a large umbrella, which goes round the tree trunk. It takes three to four passages to shake the tree to obtain the full crop. The costs are too high nowadays to do this by hand.

Unlike many other plum farmers, we produce “half-baked” prunes, the difference being : To harvest, the sugar count must be 25° to 30° Brix in order to give high quality prunes.

The plums are dehydrated to 35% humidity, after 15 to 16 hours drying at 75 to 80°C forced hot air. This method enables us to retain all the softness of the prune as well as the flavour and nutritive value. In vacuum packs these keep over a year.

Standard prunes, on the other hand, are dried to 23% humidity, after 24 hours of drying, and are kept like this for several months then rehydrated by soaking in water tanks, just prior to selling, in response to market demands.

In full organic production, we have 5 ½ hectares of open field market gardening, pumpkin, butternut squash, courgette, turnip, white onion and spinach as well as 4,000m² of cold shelter for winter lamb’s leaf this winter.

We own 18 hectares and the rest is rented. We set up in 2003 and have progressively converted all the land that we cultivate.

I have a Technical Diploma in arboriculture, which I studied at Sainte Livrade. My work placements were with organic farmers in the region, the love of the trade, the taste for hard work and the thinking that goes into to doing this organically, along with the assistance to convert all lead me to this type of cultivation.

For a year now, Aline has been looking after direct sales at markets and at the farm. She has noticed a significant increase in sales at the farm, but this is countered by a drop in sales at the markets. The consumers like to have direct contact with the producers.

The produce destined to be sold through a wider distribution is handled by Biogaronne. The benefit to us is that it is nearby, and we can organize ourselves thanks to the planning of the different cultivation.

In order to preserve the whole of the organic sector, it seems to us that the price to the producer must remain at a profitable level. We all know that the cost of organic production is higher than that of conventional cultivation; however we see the prices of organic produce going down. The risk to the consumer is that he will have produce of an inferior quality, which would be a pity, because we have the all the capacities needed to produce quality organic fruit and vegetables in our region.”

