

HISTORY OF THE PRUNE INDUSTRY IN ARGENTINA

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HISTORY

The Agen prune made its first appearance in Argentina in 1901, when one Leopoldo Suarez imported the variety from France for cultivation purposes within his agricultural concerns in the Santa Rosa and San Martin departments, located in the Province of Mendoza. It was on these properties, numbering among the largest concerns to produce this species in Argentina at the time, that he managed to successfully cultivate no less than 20 hectares of Agen plum trees.

According to the Census of 1910 for Agribusiness and the Grape and Wine-growing, Fruit-farming and Olive-growing industries (page 12), tests carried out at the National School for Grape and Wine-growing, as well as those conducted by certain Fruit-farming concerns, led experts to recommend the plantation and cultivation of this species over the whole province, owing specifically to its flavour and size.

Subsequent studies give an account of the increasing amount of success achieved by the production of this fruit, success achieved both as the prune itself and as a prune in syrup.

Ever since then, cultivation of the Agen plum tree has spread to the whole Province. The largest plantations were established south of Mendoza, where one may now find 68% of the total area under cultivation for the Province.

Elsewhere in the country, Agen plum tree plantations yield a negligible amount in commercial terms.

In 1957, after a trip to the Bordeaux Research Station in France, an expert from the EEA Junin-INTA, the Agricultural Engineer, Oscar Wouters, brought back with him the clones 623, 707 and 711, obtained following experiments carried out at this station. The second of these clones is now the most widespread.

PRODUCTION

Mendoza is practically the only prune-producing province in Argentina.

There are 285,000 hectares of cultivated land in this province, 80,000 hectares of which are planted with fruit trees.

Out of the total area currently given over to Fruit-farming, approximately 17,000 hectares are cultivated with plum trees.

Between the years 1988 and 1992 there was a 70% increase in land cultivated with plum trees, with the European plum covering 11,468 hectares of this new total; that is, nearly 67% of the total area under cultivation.

The significant increase in areas under cultivation witnessed in recent years has meant that, in the distribution by age and area, the highest percentage is represented by trees in the 0 to 4 years bracket. As we can see, properties planted with trees less than 10 years old total 66% of plantations, over 40% of which have not yet entered into production.

The Agen plum is the most cultivated variety on these European plum tree plantations, along with its improved clone 707, which, according to the graph, represent in effect 90% of the total. Other cultivated varieties are the President, Sugar, and Stanley plums, etc.

The development of Argentine prune production over the years may be seen in that graph.

The main variations shown in the Graph may be put down to climatic conditions, such as the frosts of '73, hail and the local hot, dry wind blowing in at flowering time, etc..

PRODUCTION STRUCTURE

The structure of prune production, that is, the chain of events culminating in the finished product being put on the market, may be seen. After the cultivation, the production process is as follows:

The Producers

Prune producers may be divided into three different categories: 60% of production is provided by producers of non-dried Agen plums; 30% by producers who dry their own produce themselves; and finally, the remaining 10% of total production by those producers who dry their own produce and, in turn, package the finished product themselves.

Drying and Packaging

A little over half of the prunes produced in Argentina are packaged by industrial companies who buy in the majority of their fruit from third parties which they then process.

The rest is packaged by industrial companies who process their own prune produce themselves.

Markets

Argentine prune production has two outlets: the internal and the export markets.

The internal market carries off 20% of the national output. Out of this 20%, approximately two thirds is put onto the market by Argentine companies who buy in the majority of their prunes from others which they then package, since their own fruit production is insufficient.

The remaining third is supplied to this market by those companies producing, processing and packaging their own output of prunes themselves, purchasing only a certain percentage of fruit from a handful of isolated producers.

The biggest share of national output, totalling nearly 80%, is destined for export. The origins of the exported fruit respect the same proportions as those indicated for the internal market.

Export Destinations

Argentina sells approximately 80 to 85% of its output to the Brazilian market. The rest is sent to Italy, Spain, Uruguay and France, as shown here.

MENDOZA'S CLIMATE

Mendoza is located to the west of the central region of Argentina, not far from the Andes cordillera and possesses a continental climate characteristic of arid areas. In other words, the temperatures are high in summer and very low in winter, with marked heat variations during the day. The average annual temperature is 15.9°Celsius, January being the hottest month with an average temperature of 24.1°Celsius and June being the coldest, with an average temperature of 7.4°Celsius. The Absolute Maximum temperature recorded during the period in question (1970-1980) was 40.2°C in January 1977, while the Absolute Minimum temperature recorded was -8.9°C in July 1976.

Rainfall, characteristically, arrives in short, extremely heavy bursts and occurs mainly during the Spring season. The average annual rainfall is 216.7 mm and the period during which the rains are the heaviest is logically, therefore, from November to March, representing 77.5% of the total annual rainfall. The heaviest rainfall may be recorded in the month of February with 23.6 mm representing 30.5% of the annual total.

The most serious climatic problems affecting production are the late frosts, the hail and the Zonda, a hot northerly wind of the Foehn variety, typical of the region; that is, very hot (temperatures around the 30°C mark) and very dry (Relative Humidity lower than 10%). Even though it may blow only now and again, it nevertheless lasts from July to October. More importantly, however, it does coincide more often than not with flowering time for the fruit trees. This tends to hamper the pollination process, since the wind dehydrates the pollination tubes.

PROMOTION AND ADVERTISING

It was not until last year that the Argentine prune producers came together to form the group that we see today. They were not, therefore, united by a common concern for the future of production until relatively recently.

Furthermore, up until now the supply of the prune in Argentina fell short of market demand, both on the internal and export markets. As a result, no real efforts have been made in terms of advertising to promote prune consumption.

It would now, therefore, appear to be time to provide the necessary advertising backing for this product in Argentina in order to increase national prune consumption as well as promote exports. Indeed, this is important when we consider that the areas under cultivation have grown in size, thus giving rise to future predictions of increases in production.

Ever since the Argentine Prune Association came into being, during the various discussions among the participating members, the need has emerged to widen the consumer markets. To these ends, an advertising programme has been envisaged, to promote the quality of this product, particularly given that national consumption is currently still only 70 grammes, per person, per year. However, it is not yet clear what type of publicity campaign will be implemented, and this is something which will be left to the experts in this field.

SUMMARY

Although the prune industry in Argentina already dates back 80 years, only as recently as one year ago did the producers decide to get together to form the present Argentine Prune Association.

As we have seen in this report, there has been a tremendous increase in land under plum tree cultivation over the last five years. In the meantime however, our country, along with other nations, has entered into the Common Market of South America (Mercosur). We may only hope therefore that the increases in production levels which will take place in the years to come will not result in a universal drop in prices.

In spite of all, the producers have set off in search of new markets and are currently still endeavouring to adapt their production methods to the needs of the modern-day consumer centres. An illustration of this is the successful standardisation of the finished product, destined for both the export and the internal markets.

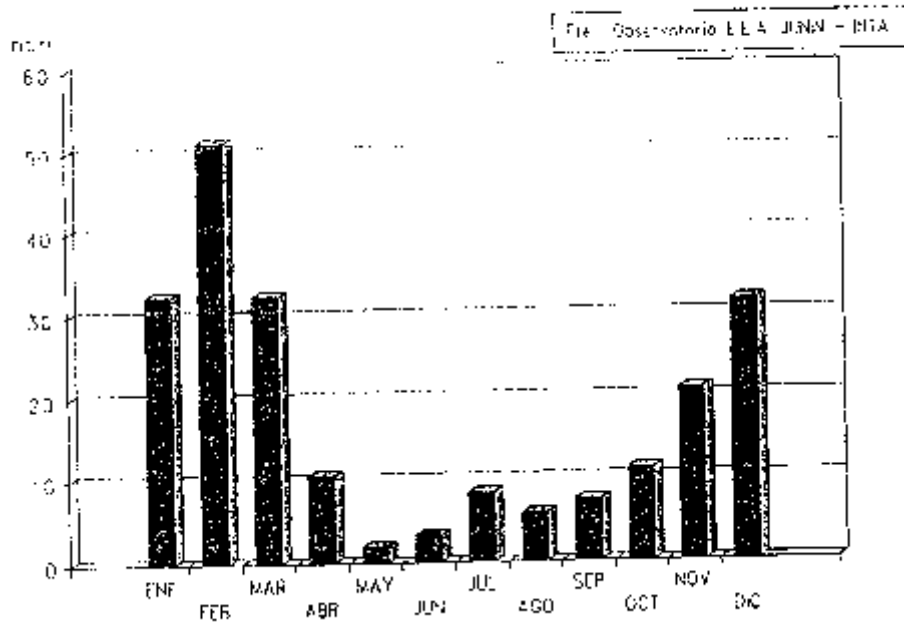
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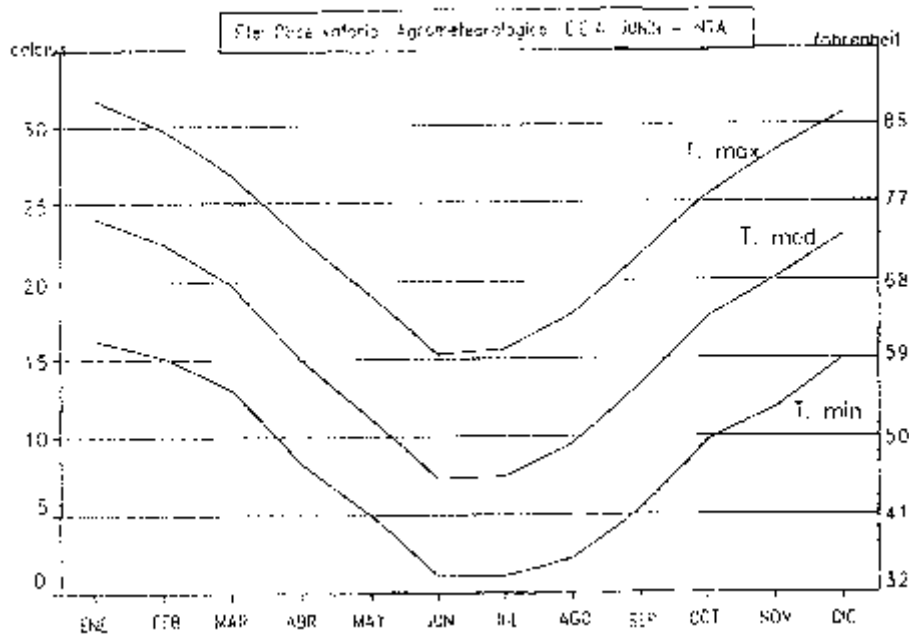
Department of Fruit-farming Technology - Government of Mendoza -FIRST CENSUS FOR FRUIT-FARMING OF MENDOZA - 1992 - Mendoza - Argentina.

RIGONI, A - SUMMARY OF CLIMATIC INFORMATION 1971/80. E.E.A. Junin - INTA - Internal publication - Mendoza - Argentina.

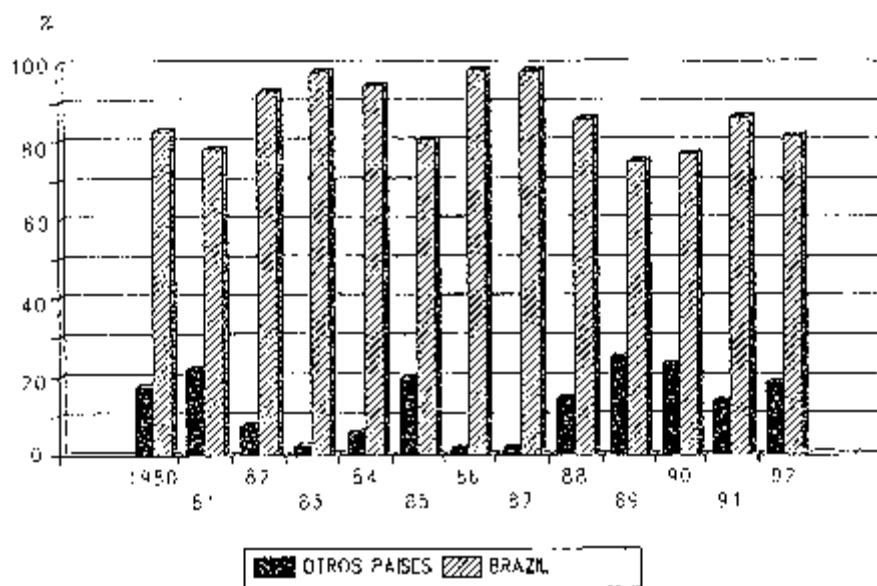
PRECIPITATIONS IN JUNIN - MENDOZA - ARGENTINA
(Monthly average 1970 - 1980)



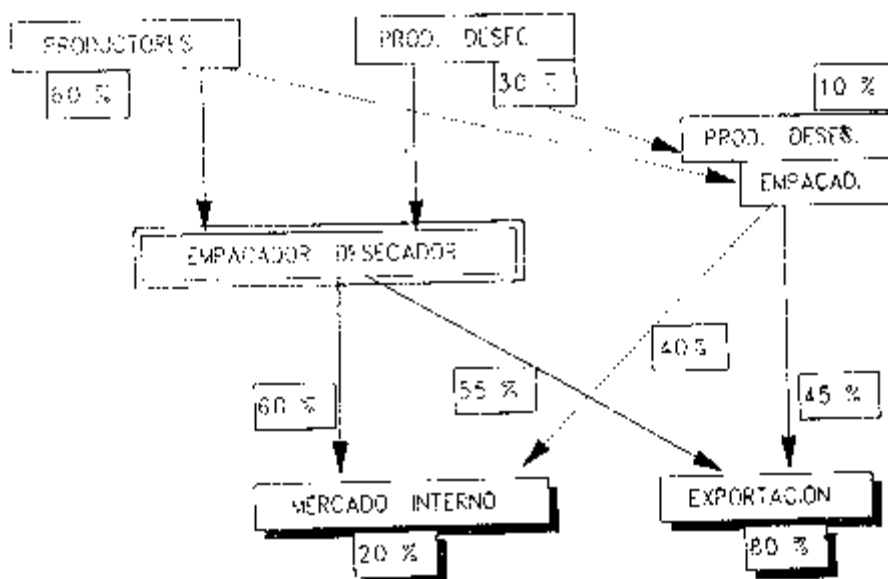
TEMPERATURES IN JUNIN - MENDOZA - ARGENTINA
(Monthly average)



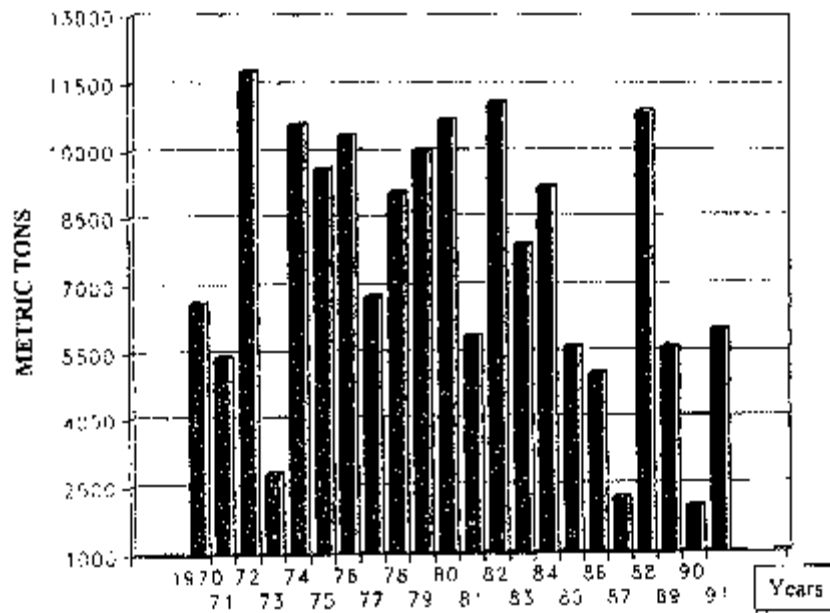
ARGENTINE PRUNE EXPORTS



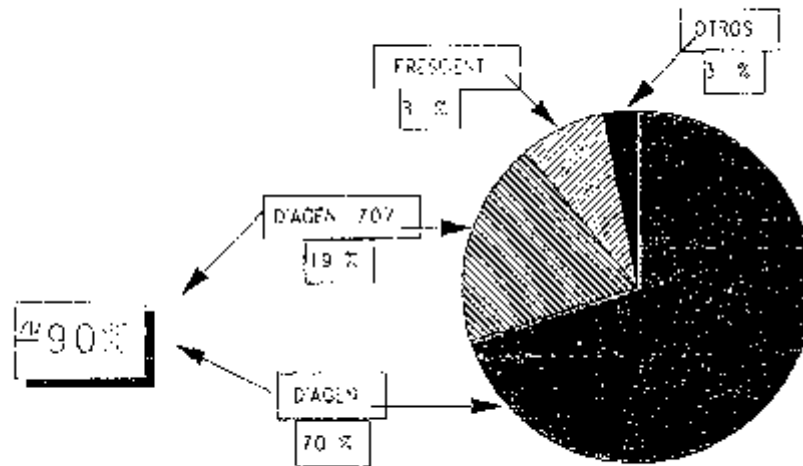
ORGANISATION OF PRUNE PRODUCTION



**ANNUAL PRODUCTION FIGURES FOR THE AGEN PRUNE
MENDOZA - ARGENTINA**

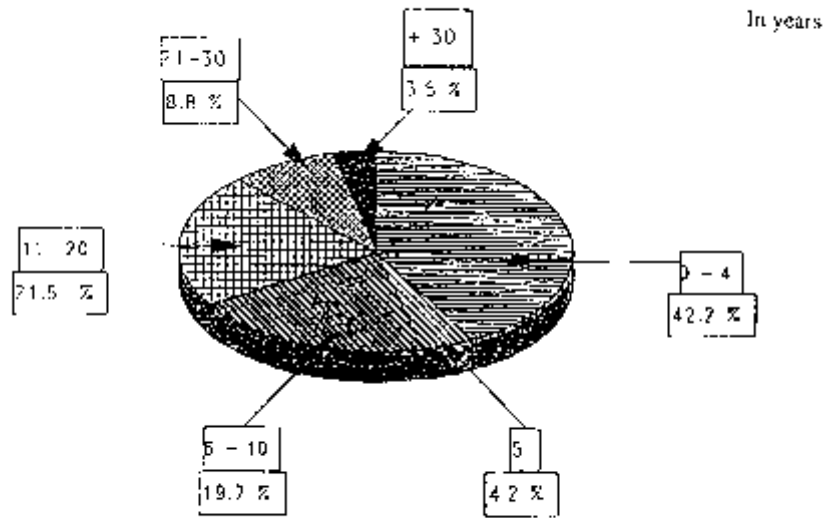


**EUROPEAN PLUMS
VARIETIES**



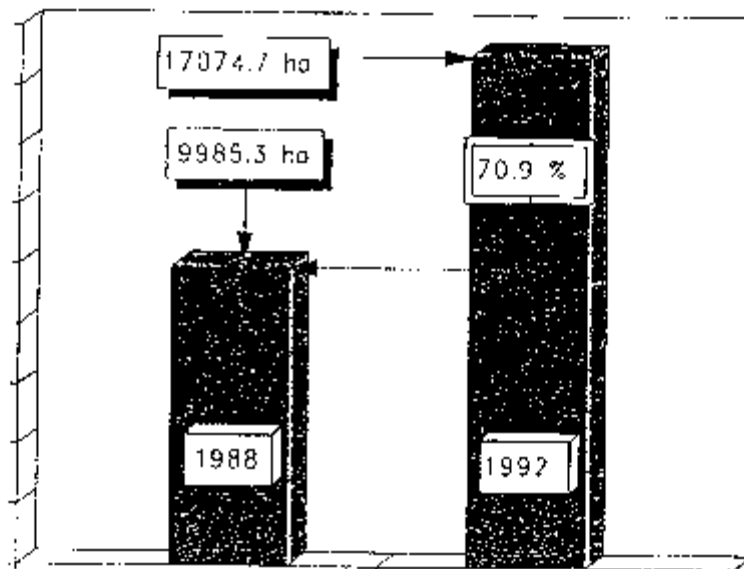
Sta. Cens. Frutidos. Provincial. 1997 - Mendoza, Argentina

DISTRIBUTION BY AGE OF PLUM TREE PLANTATIONS



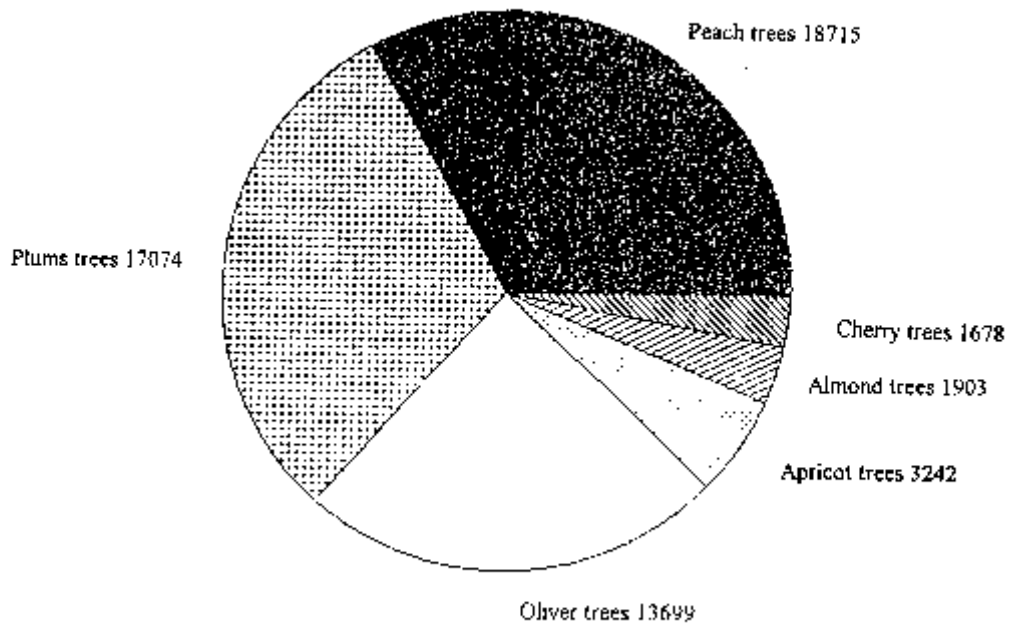
Information source: Provincial Fruit-farming Census 1992 - Mendoza - Argentina

INCREASE IN AREAS UNDER PLUM TREE CULTIVATION



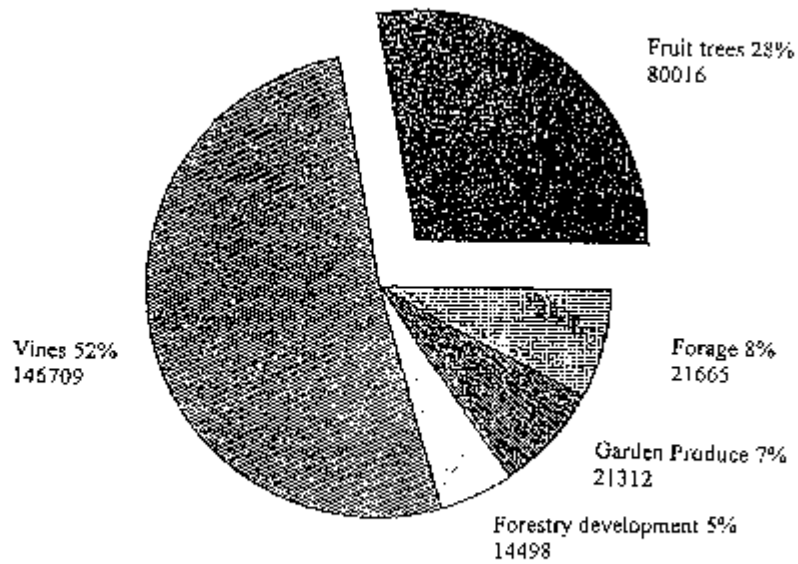
Information source: Provincial Fruit-farming Census 1992 - Mendoza - Argentina

**AREA OF ORCHARDS
(ha)**



Censo Frutícola Provincial '92. Gob. Mza.

**LAND UNDER CULTIVATION IN THE PROVINCE
(in hectares)**



Provincial Fruit-farming Census. Government of Mendoza