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ABSTRACTS



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Mechanical Harvest: A Realistic Challenge for Processed Apricot Market?

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Abstract

ILLIAD is a French national project in which sustainable food chain innovations were evaluated. One of the brakes in French apricot production is the high cost of manpower in this culture but also that fruit processors rely on the surplus fruits from the fresh consumption. This leads to a very high variability in supply, prices and quality from year to year. In this context, one solution might be a dedicated orchard to processing industries.

At first, varieties well adapted for processing and with a low demand of inputs, were screened for their behavior in mechanical harvest. Mechanical harvest was carried out using tree shaking (at 40 cm from the ground) and collection on a fabric screen. Results obtained during 2 years on more than 15 varieties and in 2 production areas are presented.

Low mechanical damages observed just after harvesting or after 7 days of storage for few varieties and the possibility to optimize shaking parameters according to agronomic and physiologic criteria (fruit falling, maturity heterogeneity,...) confirm the possibility of doing mechanical harvest and the opportunity to create dedicated orchards. Moreover, it seems possible to extend the mechanization process for apricot fresh market and not only for processed ones.