

SPOTATO:

RASHIDA: BEAUTIFUL ON THE OUTSIDE, ROBUST ON THE INSIDE

TEXT WELMOED DE HAAN-BENEDICTUS PHOTOS ANTSJE CNOSSEN, GEORGIOS GOUMAS

The new potato variety Rashida is a true all-rounder. Underneath the good looks, there is a robust variety that copes well in all conditions. And that makes growers, packers and consumers happy. From seed potatoes to a potato at the local market in Greece: we take you on a journey along this three-pronged pathway.





THE EMPLOYER: Boudewijn van der Weide

Boudewijn van der Weide is branch manager at ZOS Stiens, a wholly owned subsidiary of HZPC. There, seed potatoes are preserved, sorted, stored in boxes and bags, mechanically cooled and shipped. When we speak to Boudewijn in October, a batch of Rashida has just arrived. 'This batch is yet to be sorted. At this time of year, growers do not have time to do this themselves. Rashida is sorted at ZOS Stiens and delivered to Bangladesh in 50 kg wooden crates. The variety also goes to countries like Egypt, Greece, Lebanon, Libya and Syria.' Although Boudewijn has been 'in potatoes' for over 35 years, the process continues to fascinate him: 'In the Netherlands, we produce seed potatoes for an ever-growing world population. These seedlings are planted across the world to produce ware potatoes which are then processed to feed all these mouths. Rashida is a good choice: 'The variety has good resistance to against scab and powdered scab, provides high yields and is suitable for (home) fries. I hope Rashida finds its way to the traditional market. It is also a variety with potential for seed potato growers and HZPC wants to grow it in its acreage. For us, this is an easy potato. Rashida has a good period of dormancy and is easy to store.' The success of a variety is a sum of different links in the chain. The ZOS is important as a distribution centre. Boudewijn: 'It is our responsibility to ensure that the product is loaded correctly, at the right time and to everyone's satisfaction. I still get satisfaction from this process. Our part in the chain also contributes to global food security. That is an amazing challenge for me every day.'

THE GREEK AGENT: **Alex Koutros**

Recently, HZPC has been doing business directly with several clients in Greece. Alex represents HZPC in Greece and takes care of contacts, logistics and the promotion of new varieties. Rashida was recently introduced there. In Greece, they have a long potato season. In the warmer areas, potatoes are planted in October, but there are also areas that have a similar season to that in the Netherlands. With a breed like Rashida, Alex says you will be fine in all conditions: 'Rashida is an all-round variety. Whether you are a high-achieving professional or just a regular grower, you will always have a good yield. Rashida grows easily in different areas of Greece, has sufficient resistances and the quality is good. The variety also looks great and that is a huge advantage in a country where people still buy most of their potatoes by eye, at the local market. Alex: 'Taste and appearance are important for consumers. For the packer, what matters most is quality, and for the grower the yield must be good. Rashida does extremely well in all those areas.' It takes two to three seasons to really get to know the variety and work with it, but experiences so far have been positive. 'Growers need to see the benefits of a new variety like Rashida for themselves. A variety can only succeed if it offers something extra compared to the varieties used by growers so far. The Spunta variety, for example, is still very popular here, but Rashida has more positive characteristics. As soon as Spunta is ready for harvesting, it must be harvested to avoid disease problems and rot. Rashida can stay in the field much longer. It may be a bit early to say, but we have a lot of faith in this breed. It is one of HZPC's most promising varieties for the Greek market.'





THE PACKER AND GROWER: Georgios Goumas

In the 1960s, Georgios Goumas' father started selling vegetables at the local market in Greece. Over the years, his company Agrexpo developed as an export company, packer and grower of vegetables, olive oil, ware potatoes and seed potatoes, among other things. Now, Georgios himself is at the helm. Three years ago, he grew Rashida for the first time. 'I had heard good stories about the variety. I immediately noticed that it is a very strong plant, which can withstand high winds and rain. The variety has good dry matter content and good resistance to leaf and tuber diseases and scab. Yields are great too; around 38 to 43 tonnes per hectare. The tubers have a lovely skin and tend to be quite uniform in size. A slight disadvantage is that the tubers do not grow as fast at low temperatures. As a result, you might have to be a bit more patient with harvesting.' The Rashida potato is ideal for the Greek market; it is beautiful to look at and a great size for making fries at home. Its smooth skin and size make it the perfect potato for packing. After packing, they go to supermarkets and fresh markets in Athens and Thessaloniki. The variety has received a warm welcome at these markets too. Georgios also sees Rashida as a promising breed. Georgios: 'We have released new varieties, which are suitable for this region and the wintry weather conditions during the harvest many times before. Rashida is a versatile variety that does well across the board: from planting to plate. So we have very high expectations.'

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