

**INFORMATION SYSTEMS FOR SMALL
HOLDER AGRICULTURAL PRODUCERS:
THE MERCOSUR ONION'S
INFORMATION NET**

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*This report has been written based on the work of
"Mercosur Onion's Information Net" which is being
developed by all its participants since March 9th, 1998*

ABSTRACT

Arrangement of an adequate price's information of agricultural products that are cultivated by small farmers constitute a key element to facilitate commercial operations, improving their incomes. So, it's necessary to develop an agile, dynamical and transparent information mechanism, in order to link producers, buyers, technical, and public organizations, between themselves and others.

These elements were had in account to implement MERCOSUR Onion's Information Net. It was started in 1998 by the Agricultural Social Program (PSA) and INTA in San Juan's province (Argentina). Today, there are more of 20 representative of public and private institutions of various South American countries that participate in it. The main aim of the experience was the articulation of an information net-system which linked the agents who participate in producing and marketing the products, in order to have information to permit every actors knowing at all times the situation of the product's markets.

Ideas, interpretations and conclusions of this document, are author's own, and they aren't necessary Programa Social Agropecuario's criterions

1) Introduction.

Improvement of all aspects linked to the information of markets of the products of the small farmers is a key element to optimize taking of decisions regarding the commercial canalization of the same ones. It's possible to give by this way elements for producers and technicians to work with them to optimize the taking of decisions to operate in more advantageous commercialization channels, or, in their defect, to improve the operative ones in the traditionally used channels.

Particularly important it is the knowledge of the prices that are paid in field to the producers by habitual buyers (wholesalers, middlemen, etc.); this kind of information is very difficult to obtain, and little diffused too, contrary to the prices of the product in wholesalers markets, data that are frequently published in newspapers, specialized publications, either in their traditional form (paper), or more recently, through the respective pages of Internet.

Information that is of utility for the small producer should act like a base of comparison to obtain in the diverse markets elements that becomes a guide in turn for the future planning of the production.

Gathering the information, two obstacles appear: the truthfulness of the same one and the scarce articulation among the sources. Although these provide in many cases of good information, many times we find

difficulties starting from their dispersion and the scarce linking of what happens at the same time in the most important markets with what happens simultaneously in the main producers areas.

All these elements have been kept in mind to take the activity that we point out in this report : the "Mercosur Onion's Information Net" task that, in the Agricultural Social Programm's (PSA) ambit, is developed by Provincial Unit of San Juan's-PSA. PSA is developed by the Secretary of Agriculture, Livestock, Food and Fisheries of the Argentine Republic (SAGPyA) and promotes, among other activities, the development of actions to improve economic and social conditions of peasants, small producers and farmers. PSA tries too of obtaining a better relation between these groups and the market, through the facilitation of its access of its production.

Basically, the objective was the articulation of an information system that links to the interested parts: producers, merchants, and technicians, with the purpose of having information of quality and with a such frequency to allow us to know in all moment the situation of the market of a product, onion in this case.

2) Onion production in San Juan's province and the lacks of commercial information.

The onion is a production that is characterized by showing oscillations marked in its rates among a season and other, inside oneself campaign in relatively brief lapses of time.

Although with differences for the magnitude of the variations, this behavior is presented so much with the prices in field of the main producers area of the country like in the markets of destination of its productions (mainly, Brazil).

The main areas of onion production in the Argentina are located in the provinces of Buenos Aires, San Juan, Mendoza and Santiago del Estero. Buenos Aires is the biggest producer with a near participation of 50% of the national total, and it covers the period of March to September. San Juan's province, with 15%, of total, has an offer that embraces the whole year. In this province, onion is the most important horticultural cultivation. The implanted total surface reached in the campaign 97/98 to 4.174 hectares, of which 1.935 correspond to the department of Jáchal. It fits to highlight that the onion production in the valley of Jáchal is an activity that comes carrying out for more than 50 years. However, in the last years the market of the product suffered big transformations that impacted in the competitiveness of the product of the region

(Dirección de Mercados de Productos No Tradicionales, op. cit).

During last years, the most important change in the demand is the conformation of the MERCOSUR that allowed the development from an important and growing flow of Argentinean exports to Brazil was. Although the neighboring country traditionally cared onion from the Argentina, the conformation of the regional block allowed to reach records, with more than 300.000 TM of onion exported to this market (Pechuán, A., op. cit.).

The commercial exchange of onion inside the MERCOSUR is developed mainly between Brazil and Argentina, and in smaller measure, Uruguay and Paraguay. This exchange has been increased flagrantly starting from the decade of the 90, motivated by the necessity of the Brazilian market and the immediate reaction of the sector productive Argentinean to cover this demand. Practically the total cared by the countries members of this Market comes from the exchange among the same ones, being highly the Argentina the country exporter inside the MERCOSUR and Brazil its inverse one.

One of the central problems that should make front the medium and small producers is the scarce information about prices. Sometimes, it also happens a difference among the time in receiving the information and the changes that can take place in that lapse, for what can be outdated when counting on her.

Difficulties exist to get the appropriate information. In general, the sources are dispersed, barely organized among them and it is not generally linked at the same time to the more important markets with what happens simultaneously in the main producers area, supplying of them.

The lack of the appropriate information by the producers, in the moments that they should make decisions take them to make errors that reduce their scanty gain margins. Then, there is a necessity to orchestrate a system of information to link the interested parts: producers, buyers, technicians, public organisms, among others.

Commercialization of onion in Jáchal.

The knowledge of traditional markets mechanisms in Jáchal Valley, the main onion area in San Juan, could be a valious indicator to recognize th importance of a tool as Onion's Net.

Regarding Jáchal's situation, PSA-San Juan and the Agency of INTA in that place consigs that "the onion production in Jáchal is one of the most important economic activities in the department, and it is carried out by numerous small producers, for which it represents its main source of revenues. These producers find it more and more difficult to adapt to the characteristics that present the markets.

In general, commercial operative in Jáchal is carried out traditionally through middlemen that acquire the onion heaped in conservation structures known as "whales." This operator takes charge of the tasks of having pocketed, habitually carried out to field, and of the distribution of the product until the definitive buyers. For the producer, the advantage of this system is its simplicity, added to the fact that it needs to finance the packing expenses and commercialization. The most serious difficulty that presents this operative is that it doesn't allow any control degree on the commercial administration and it prevents to develop new commercial strategies.

This structure of operation of the commercialization is functional in a context of "stable market", but it shows its limitations in years of production excess and depressed prices. In these cases, the producer practically is forced "to surrender" their merchandise to tiny values. In many cases, it doesn't not even suit to harvest.

With the conformation of the first groups of the PSA and Cambio Rural (a programm developed by INTA, destined to farmers and medium-size producers) in the area, toward 1994, it became evident the necessity to give answer to the demand of the producers. In the first stages it was necessary to define with more precision the characteristics of the demand, being detected the necessity to have better information on the behavior of the market of the product. The concern outlined by the producers in this topic motivated the conformation of support teams in the commercial topics, to generate actions in order to have a good level of commercial to allow the technicians to offer an appropriate commercial advice to the groups." (PSA San Juan – AER INTA Jáchal, op. cit.)

3) Emergence of Onion's Information Net.

The idea of a system of information of onion prices was of the engineers Gustavo Matocq (PSA San Juan), Alfredo Estévez (AER Jáchal INTA) and Arturo Pechuán (AER Pocito INTA). The finality was to bring San Juan's producers an instrument to get better prices in markets for their onion production.

The objectives to reach were:

- To have information of quality and with a such frequency to allow to know in all moment the situation in the main markets.
- To have for each one of the production areas the prices in field, paid to the producers.
- To know the state of the cultivations along their cycle or even during the post-harvest.
- To estimate the implanted surfaces and the yields waited in each one of the producers area, previous to the harvest.
- To predict the behavior of the prices of the onion in the main markets of the region.
- To link interested people (producers, buyers, technicians, public organisms, among other) in the problem of this cultivation.
- To diffuse information linked to this cultivation, e.g.: general news, technical topics, regulations, seminars, congresses, etc.

In a first stage the general characteristics of the operation of this system were delineated in net form, such as type of information to receive, frequency with which it should arrive to the place where it would be analyzed and rhythm with which the circular would be emitted.

Mrs Mabel Pereyra, (Undersecretary of Economic Programming, province of Mendoza), Mrs. Laura Marún and Miss Elida Hidalgo (both of Cambio Rural Programm), also participate in this information system since the beginning of the net.

Later on the first contacts, many technicians linked to the sector knew the initiative and were interested to participate in it. An extremely important incorporation was the Engineer Guido Boeing (of the ICEPA, of Santa Catarina, Brazil), for the quality of the given information, besides the importance that has this country as destination of export of the onion.

Central activity of the Net is the elaboration and electronic distribution (by e-mail) of a weekly bulletin with information of the main wholesalers markets of MERCOSUR, prices at level of the producer for each one of the areas, marketed volumes and inform of state of the cultivations of each area producer. This bulletins are elaborated by Eng Gustavo Matocq and Eng Arturo Pechuan. Starting from the first bulletins, they were incorporating other professionals of the country and of the exterior (Brazil and Uruguay) conforming a group at the present time of about 20 professionals and their respective institutions and organisms of ownership linked through the Net (Refer to Participants of Mercosur Onion's Information Net).

For a correct operation of the Net of Information of Onion, the quality of the information that is sent as its continuity, constitutes key aspects.

Basically, the Net offers specific information on the following aspects:

1 - Weekly information of the main concentration markets in MERCOSUR countries.

It includes prices in the markets of Buenos Aires, Córdoba and recently Santa Fe, in Argentina, besides the main centers of Brazil and Uruguay.

2 - Weekly information of the prices paid in the main areas of onion production.

This information is raised through producers in each area, that is obtained by technicians and institutions linked to this activity. The information includes the conditions in which the operation is made (quality, packing, etc.) to be able to compare the data later on. The information should be the most detailed possible, for example when prices are indicated, it's necessary to consign caliber, quality, origin, among others elements.

3 - Surface and state of the cultivations and stock in each producer area.

Once adjusted the details, the first circular was sent in March 9th, 1998. At this moment (June 2000,) more than 120 Bulletins were submitted uninterrupted, mainly with a weekly frequency. A reproduction of one of those circular ones is shown in the Annex 1.

It interests to highlight the presence in the Net of two key sources of information:

- a) the related to the offer, represented by the prices that register in the main producers area of the Argentina and
- b) all that happens in the market Brazilian, main destination of the Argentinian exports of this product.

Favorable results that are obtained with the operation of the Net are possible in significant form by the disposition of this information week to week, through the real engagement of all Net's participants.

4) Achievements and difficulties in the operation of the Net.

Not much more than two years of Net's initiation, we can count significant achievements, and also some difficulties that can end up limiting in the future a to work effective.

The main achievements are:

- The Net allows to have information of quality with a such frequency to allow to know, practically in all moment, the situation in the main region's markets.

- It makes possible to have for the main production areas the prices in field, paid to the producers, in way of being able to link them with the prices quoted in the destination markets.

- We can obtain information about the general state of the cultivations along their cycle or even during the post-harvest for the main producers area, for example of the climatic conditions that can affect them, intense rains, hails, etc..

- The knowledge of implanted surfaces and the yields waited in each one of the producers areas, previous to the harvest.

- Bonds settle down among many people interested in the problem of this cultivation (producers, buyers, technicians, public organisms, among other)

- Onion's Net constitutes a vehicle for the diffusion of information linked to the revenues of onion of third countries, congresses, seminars, new regulations, etc. We must mention that Onion's Net was presented during "XI Brazilian National Seminar of Onion", carried out in Ituporanga, Santa Catarina, Brazil, in March, 1999. In that event, was included the word "MERCOSUR" at his title.

There are difficulties, too; some of these are:

- Insufficient data are sometimes observed about the volumes marketed in the different places.

- The prediction capacity should be improved, in way of foreseeing with more precision what can happen in the future.

- There is an apparent necessity to have periodic information of the exit of trucks of each producer province, in order to know the physical movement of merchandise to evaluate the level of demand of the different markets and the evolution of the stocks in each one of the areas.

- It is necessary to have information of other markets in Argentina, (Rosario, Tucumán) and in other countries of the MERCOSUR, as Paraguay.

5) Projection of the Net towards the future.

Starting from the sustained operation of the “Onion’s Net”, it is possible, to delineate with more precision the future actions.

Consolidation of the Net will allow, in first term, to improve the received information, and in second place, to enlarge the same one. There are many topics that would be appropriate to incorporate, among those that stand out:

- the regulations in Custom’s matters.
- phytosanitary regulations, as in origin areas and destination,
- information about input systems, logistics, packaging, and services of transport
- articulation modalities among offer and it demands, commercial documentation, juridical aspects, etc.
- information about commercial opportunities.

At the same time, Onion’s Net constitutes an excellent example to attempt, to take the experience ahead with other products of importance in the economy of the small farmers and peasants

The Net is becoming the embryo of Commercial Information Net, to connect all the units of the Program with other companies, organisms and institutions linked to the thematic and operative commercial. This will serve as a base to think in the future in the possibility of

constituting Centers of commercial Information at national, regional and provincial level, in order to centralize information of utility for commercialization actions. These Centers would act as reporters, processors, and distributors of market information that, for their characteristics of specificity, accessibility or cost, could make convenient a handling of this nature.

Also, the conformation of a System of Identification and diffusion of commercial opportunities, constitutes another goal to reach. This implies the diffusion of those possibilities of short purchase term and sale of products in the local, provincial, regional or national markets, as well as of all information that could be of utility could for the concretion of future business among interested actors.

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RED DE INFORMACIÓN DE CEBOLLA DEL MERCOSUR (2000) : *Boletines de la Red de Información de Cebolla del MERCOSUR,, year 2000, San Juan.*

ANNEX 1:

**REPRODUCTION OF A CIRCULAR OF
“THE MERCOSUR’S INFORMATION NET”**

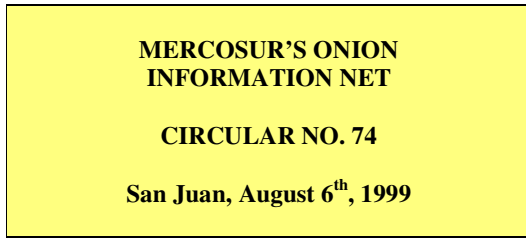


Table of Contents

- 1) Prices in field
- 2) Prices in Markets
- 3) List’s participants

1) Prices in field

Origin	Prices (\$)	Observations
San Juan, Tulúm Valley	0,50 – 0,70	Valenciana
San Juan, Jáchal	0,50 – 0,60	Valenciana
South of Buenos Aires	0,50 – 0,70	Valenciana
Río Negro	0,50	Valenciana

References:

- Values correspond to onion’s necessary quantity to complet a bag of 25 kg, paid to the producers in “whales”.
- Values written in green represent increases with relationship to prices informed in the last previous circular. Values in **red** indicate descens, while when they are in **black**, it means that changes have not taken place.
- In Tulúm Valley, the scarce activity is continuuing, and prices stay in values of the last week, \$ 0,50 –0,70 for bag in operations of counted or 30 days.
- Eng. Adriana Koninjenburg and Leticia Tamburo, from Río Negro, inform that the market doesn’t register big variations. In general, they are being carried out operations for internal market to \$ 1,50 for finshed bag. The export hasn’t had a lot of mobility. Seed

estimates aren’t still for the next campaign, but it’s not observed that there is a loto of prepared earth.

- Completing the information of the first semester of expenditures of the protected region to the south of Colorado’s River, including areas of production of the south from Buenos Aires and Río Negro, we present the following table:

**Onion’s Protected region
Volume destined to export and internal market (In Tons)**

	TOTAL
Wholesaler	27.177
Deposit	
Packing shed	61
Industry	217
Middleman	29
Wholesaler	38.019
Markets	
Retailer	973
Producer	60
Supermarket	2.198
General total	68.733

**Onion’s Protected region
Volume destined to export and internal, by container type (In Tons)**

	TOTAL
BIN	68
Bag (10 KG)	1.290
Bag (20 KG)	135.333
Bag (25 KG)	93.629
Box (25 KG)	39
Wood cage	11
Others	2.721
General total	233.091

2) Prices in markets

- Corresponding to 2-6 August, 1999, week. All values are without IVA and they are for 25 kg bag.
- In **MCBA (Buenos Aires Central Market)** there aren’t observed variations regard to the maximum and minima prices, relationed last week

.Market	Type	Price (\$)			Origin	Quality	Gauge	Observations
		Máx.	Middle	Min.				
Córdoba		3.50	3.25	3.00				Price: 26/7
Santa Fe	Valcat		3.50			1°		Price: 28/7
Rawson (San Juan)	Valcat	3.00		3.50	San. Juan.	1°	Middle	Prices of the last week
Guaymallén Mendoza	Valcat		2.75		Mza.			Prices of the last week
MCBA	Valcat	1.50	1.20	1.00	Mza	2°	Little	
	Valcat	3.00	2.60	2.00	Mza	2°	Middle	
	Valcat	3.50	2.80	2.00	Bs As	2°	Middle	

- Coments about **Córdoba's market**, by Elida Hidalgo and Laura Marún: Prices of onion in the Cordona market for this week are of \$3,00 - \$3,50 the bag of Valenciana of 2ª quality. The onion is quoting very little in the market as consequence of the great quantity and mainly the bad quality, since most is sprouted. People have also been observed distributing onion in truck for different Cordoba's towns. Most of the onion that enters to this market is coming from San Juan and Mendoza, approximately 5% comes from the South of Bs. For next weeks the entrance onion of better quality of Santiago del Estero is expected.
- In the **market of Santa Fe** the onion bag was sold at \$ 3.00 (minimum) and \$ 3,50 (maximum)and it presents an increase of the order of a weight for bag with regard to the previous week.
- In the Model Market of Uruguay, inform sent by Engs. Fernando Gemelli and. Rubén Barboza, consigns that between 19th and 23th July, the onion commercialization in the Model Market was averaged by one flowing placement, although the rates didn't present modifications with regarding last week. Also the offer in this month registers similar behavior with regard to last month of June. An excellent change is appreciated with regard to the quality average of the offer, which is

inferior to that of the month of June, in fact they are very few departures which could be classified as extra quality or special

REVENUES OF DRY ONION TO THE MODEL MARKET (MONTEVIDEO, ROU)

Weeks of July	19-23/7	12-16/7	05-9/7
Revenues (kgs)	195,388	171,956	180,537
Weekly variation (%)		13.6	-4.8
Weeks of June	21-25/6	14-18/6	7-11/6
Revenues (kgs)	185.602	89.280	130.304
Weekly variation (%)		42,4	45,9

- Reference prices (U\$S7kg) at the end of the present week were:
 - national onion of first quality: U\$S 0.28 - 0.32
 - . imported onion (Argentina) : U\$S 0.32 - 0.36
 - . imported onion (Chile) : U\$S 0.30 - 0.34

- **Eng. Guido Boeing (ICEPA, Brazil) sends the following report¹:**

Inicialmente, gostaria de dar as boas-vindas às colegas Eve Iñiguez de Santiago del Estero e Adriana Van Konijnenburg e Leticia Tambuco de Rio Negro, à Rede de Informação de Cebola do Mercosul e cumprimentá-las publicamente pelas excelentes matérias disponibilizadas.

Tenho absoluta certeza que a equipe da Rede foi extremamente beneficiada pela incorporação das colegas ao grupo. Quiça, possamos enriquecer cada vez mais nosso informativo, diminuir as diferenças existentes entre os nossos países e promover o bem-estar da classe ceboleira do Mercosul.

Em anexo, as informações disponíveis para a Rede.

PREÇOS APRESENTAM-SE EM BAIXA

Os trabalhos de transplante de mudas na Região Sul do país continuam dentro do cronograma previsto. As condições climáticas têm sido favoráveis para a execução dessa tarefa, assim como para o desenvolvimento das mudas que se apresentam com índice de doenças abaixo do verificado em anos anteriores.

No Estado de São Paulo e nas Regiões produtoras do Nordeste (Pernambuco e Bahia), intensificam-se as operações de colheita, que deverão permanecer bastante fortes até o final do próximo mês.

A normalização do transporte redoviário no Brasil permitiu a recomposição dos estoques e determinou mudanças no comportamento da comercialização da cebola. O mercado voltou a operar com grande movimentação do produto e preços e recuo em praticamente todos os grandes centros de consumo do país.

Do total da oferta que se registra na Capital de São Paulo, estima-se que 70% seja formado de bulbo provenientes do Brasil (originários principalmente das regiões produtoras de Monte Alto e São José do Rio Pardo/SP) e 30% constituídos de produto importado da Argentina.

Na comercialização paralela da Pracinha, na capital paulista, de acordo com informações da Bolsa de Cereais, os preços de venda situam-se de **R\$ 4,50 a R\$ 5,50/sc** de 20 quilos para o produto nacional e de **R\$ 7,00 a R\$ 8,00/sc** para a cebola importada.

Nas principais centrais de abastecimento do Norte, Nordeste e Centro-Sul do País, os valores de venda situam-se conforme quadro a seguir.

¹ The report is in its original language (Portuguese), as it is in the original version of Bulletin.

CEBOLA - PREÇOS NO MERCADO ATACADISTA DO BRASIL

(R\$/sc de 20 quilos)

PRAÇA	NÍVEIS DE PREÇO			PROCEDÊNCIA
	Mínimo	M.Comum	Máximo	
Porto Alegre	5,00	7,00	9,00	Nacional
	7,00	8,00	9,00	Importada
Florianópolis	4,00	6,00	7,00	Nacional
	8,00	9,00	10,00	Importada
Curitiba	6,50	7,00	7,50	Nacional
	8,00	8,50	9,00	Importada
Campinas	8,00	9,00	10,00	Nacional
	10,00	11,00	12,00	Importada
São Paulo (Ceagesp)	5,44	6,09	6,44	Nac/SP (graúda)
	5,44	6,09	6,44	Nac/SP (média)
	4,44	4,44	5,44	Nac/SP (miúda)
	5,00	6,00	7,00	Nac/MG(graú/med)
	4,00	4,50	5,00	Nac/MG (miúda)
	8,00	9,00	9,00	Importada (graúda)
	8,00	9,00	9,00	Importada (média)
	7,00	7,00	8,00	Importada (miúda)
Rio de Janeiro	5,00	6,00	6,00	Nacional
	8,00	8,00	9,00	Importada
Brasília	6,00	7,00	8,00	Nacional
	10,00	10,00	11,00	Importada
Belo Horizonte	4,00	5,00	6,00	Nacional
	8,00	8,00	9,00	Importada
Salvador	3,50	3,50	4,00	Nacional
	7,00	8,00	9,00	Importada
Recife	4,00	4,00	5,00	Nacional
	5,00	6,00	7,00	Importada
Belém	7,00	7,00	8,00	Nacional
	13,00	13,00	13,00	Importada

FONTE: Ceasas dos Estados.

ELABORAÇÃO: Instituto Cepa/SC.

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OBS: Verde = Aumento;

Vermelho = Redução;

Preto = S/mudança.

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