

# Almaverde branches out into organic salads

Organics consortium Almaverde Bio Italia has linked up with fresh cut salad specialist SIPO to launch a new line of organic salads under the Almaverde label. **Rebecca Armstrong** reports

**B**USINESS is booming at Italian organics consortium Almaverde, following an intensive media campaign and growing consumer concern over food safety. Massimiliano Ceccarini of Almaverde supplier SIPO reported that the ongoing BSE crisis had played a major role in boosting organics sales.

In response to rising demand for naturally produced foods, Almaverde Bio has linked up with several leading organics producers of dried fruit and nuts, tinned and frozen vegetables, orange juice, wine, vinegar and fresh cut salads to complement its existing range of fresh fruit and vegetable products.

Earlier this year, Almaverde joined forces with salad marketer SIPO, which has been active in the pre-prepared salad industry since 1986. Following the partnership, SIPO will produce ready-to-use organic salads, herbs and vegetables under the Almaverde Bio brandname in addition to its own range, 'Sapori del mio Orto'.

The Romagna-based marketer has an annual turnover of around L20bn and markets around 25,000 tonnes of integrated and organic product a year. "Our organics range has really taken off over the last year, and we are increasing production to keep up with demand," said Mr Ceccarini. Last year, SIPO achieved a turnover of L160m compared to only L45m in 1999.

The company is already reaping the rewards from its Almaverde connection. In the first two weeks of May, SIPO raked in L50m, more than during the whole of 1999. Mr Ceccarini put the boom down to a vigorous advertising campaign in the Italian press and television. Over the Easter period, Almaverde ran a series of high-profile adverts on Italy's RAI and Mediaset television channels.

"After the campaign we received a lot of telephone calls from consumers wanting to know where they could purchase our salads," said Mr Ceccarini. At present SIPO's client base is concentrated in Emilia Romagna and Tuscany in northern Italy, although according to Mr Ceccarini, the company can deliver to



*Massimiliano Ceccarini of SIPO*

anywhere in Italy in under 24 hours with its fleet of 20 refrigerated lorries.

Italian supermarkets Coop, Conad and PAM, are among the company's most important clients, though SIPO also has its eye on retailers in Germany and France. "We are currently running trials in Germany with Metro and if all goes to plan we will start supplying the chain in September," reported Mr Ceccarini.

After the summer SIPO plans target other areas of the Italian peninsula including supermarkets, small regional chains, independent stores and whole-

salers. Mr Ceccarini explained that some potential clients were concerned about not being able to maintain the cold chain effectively over the hot summer months and preferred to wait until the weather cooled down in the autumn. "Fresh-cut salads are extremely perishable, more so than ordinary fresh fruit and vegetables," he explained.

SIPO also has a number of new products up its sleeve, which it is also saving up for the autumn. "One of the most exciting products, is our Ethnic Salad in a PET bowl with a lid. It contains a sachet of salad dressing and can be eaten direct from the container," he said. The new product contains a selection of salad leaves, croutons, raisins, pinenuts and walnuts, which are supplied by Almaverde dried fruit specialist Besana.

Altogether SIPO produces over 30 different salad combinations in bags, bowls and trays, including curly endive, scarola endive, red radicchio, peppers, courgettes, rocket, carrots, onion, borlotti beans, chickpeas, celery and cabbage. The 200g bags of mixed salad (scarola endive, curly endive and red radicchio) is the biggest seller, although Mr Ceccarini reported that Coop and Conad were increasing orders of smaller packs. ■