Aubergine

Market requirements

Varieties: The main market is for dark purple Florida varieties, two popular ones being Long Purple and Black Beauty.

There is a smaller ethnic market for small, thin purple type (raviya). White and yellow are also being introduced.

Standards: EEC minimum standard requirements stipulate all aubergines must be:

- whole
- fresh in appearance
- firm
- sound (produce affected by rotting or deterioration such as to make it unfit for consumption is excluded)
- clean, and practically free of any visible foreign matter
- provided with calyx and peduncle which may be slightly damaged
- sufficiently developed, without their flesh being fibrous or woody and without overdevelopment of seeds
- free of abnormal external moisture
- free of any foreign smell and/or taste

Three classes are defined for aubergines: Classes I, II and III (though the latter can be suspended under EEC regulations).

Class I must be of good quality and practically free of sunburn. They may show slight:

- defect of shape
- discolouration at base
- bruising and/or healed cracks of not more than 3 cm^2

Class II may show:
- defects of shape
- defects of colouring
- slight sun-scorch or dry superficial defect, but not more than 4 cm^2

Class III may:
- be slightly fibrous
- show considerable seed development
- show sun-scorch or superficial defects, but not more than 6 cm^2

Size: 175-300 gm per fruit: 200 gm is the most popular
Long Purple: 25 cm length
8 cm diameter
Black Beauty: 12.5 cm length
9 cm diameter
EEC minimum diameters are:
40 mm for long, maximum variation 20 mm
70 mm for global, maximum variation 25 mm
EEC minimum weight is 100 grams
Size tolerance of 10% allowed, providing:
Class I: still conforms to size immediately above or below that specified
Class II & III: not conforming to minimum size
Raviya: 20-30 cm length

Shape: Black Beauty regular oval and undamaged, with green calyx intact
Long Purple can be less ovular

Colour: Deep purple or black and shiny, waxy skin
White should be creamy

Ripeness: Developed and firm, without flesh being fibrous or woody or containing developed seeds

Taste & Texture: Firm pulp, not woody

(continued)

Getting to market

Handling and Storage

Aubergines can be stored for up to 10 days, but they must be kept at a temperature of around 8-10ºC: the vegetable will deteriorate at temperatures above and below this. Relative humidity should be maintained at between 90 and 95%.

Packaging

Aubergines, particularly the Long Purple variety, are preferably packed in two layers in 5/6 kg cartons with a full lid. Black Beauties may be jumble packed, providing they are size graded, though the trade tends to prefer layered produce, for better presentation.

Information which must be printed on the package "produce short side" is:

- origin - country is mandatory, more detail is optional
- produce indication is mandatory if the contents are not visible
- trade specifications, class, weight, count and size.

Handling information can also be displayed, giving temperature range, fragile symbol and side-up symbol.

Branding and Promotion

Branding is not a major feature in the aubergine market, though the Dutch and the Cypriots have carried out some promotion of aubergines. The Netherlands target their promotion of specific crops on an annual basis, according to crop supply, crop innovations, such as the introduction of new colours, and the movement of produce on the market. Aubergines are also included when Dutch vegetables are promoted in general. Multiples are usually willing to consider in-store promotions in co-operation with a supplier. As a minimum for promotion, it is important that produce is clearly labelled, the packaging looks attractive and the origin is clearly displayed, if repeat orders are to be obtained.

It is mandatory to label produce by:

- country of origin
- as aubergine, if not visible
- class
- net weight
- count

and advisable (mandatory for EEC and Mediterranean countries) to include:

- size
- date of packing
- packer and/or dispatcher

Handling information can also be displayed, giving temperature range, fragile and side-up symbols.

Import Regulations

Aubergines come under tariff number 0709 30 00 and tariffs are as follows:

	1 Jan-14 Jan	**15 Jan-31 Mar**	**1 Apr-30 Apr**	**1 May-30 Nov**	**1 Oct-30 Nov**	**1 Dec-31 Dec**
Full tariff:	16%	16%	16%	16%		16%
GSP countries:	9%	9%	16%	16%		16%
Canary Islands:	5.6%	5.6%	5.6%	5.6%		5.6%
Israel:	16%	5.6%	5.6%	16%		16%
Least developed developing countries (LDDC):	Free	Free	Free	Free		Free
ACP countries:	Free	Free	Free	Free		Free
Turkey:	9%	Free	Free	16%		16%
Jordan:	16%	6.4%	6.4%	16%		16%
Algeria, Tunisia Morocco:	6.4%	6.4%	6.4%	16%		16%
Cyprus*:	4.6%	4.6%	4.6%	16%	except 5.2%	4.6%

* *Subject to quota during1 October to 30 November*

In order to receive preferential tariff treatment, produce must be accompanied by the appropriate forms: EUR 1 for ACP countries or Form A for GSP countries or least developed developing countries (LDDC). However, aubergines are also governed by the reference price system from 1 April to 31 October, through which a compensatory tax is levied on produce if CIF prices are below the price set seasonally (or for part of a season) by the EEC. Certain hygiene standards must be met and all fresh produce entering the EEC must be accompanied by the original of a phytosanitory certificate (See Appendix 1).

When to sell

Timing

The market is well supplied in the summer months by European suppliers including France, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and the UK itself. However, Cyprus also exports to the UK from May to November. Other suppliers, mainly exporting during the off-season winter months, are:

Canary Islands:	January-June
The Gambia:	November-December
Israel:	October-March
Jamaica:	all year, to fill gaps
Jordan:	December-January
Kenya:	all year

Bangladesh, Ghana, Pakistan and Zambia are other Commonwealth countries which have supplied the market.

The winter months of December-February, outside the Netherlands supplying period, have better prospects for exporters, as buyers are keen to source high quality aubergines in reasonable quantities then. Current winter sources of supply are either of poor quality, or insufficient quantity to satisfy demand. Wholesale prices reflect the seasonality of the market, with higher prices being quoted December/January/February. While the average annual price was 126pence per kg in 1988/89, it went up to 240 pence per kg in February and below 80 pence in August.

Market Trends

Imports of aubergines have shown a 20% increase in volume over the last ten years, although they fell back slightly from a peak in 1985. Annual market value is estimated at £8 million. Trade opinion is that the upward trend in consumption will continue, but that new exporters would have problems competing with high quality produce coming from the Netherlands in the summer. There is greater opportunity during the winter months, when buyers have been unhappy with the quality of supply received from their traditional sources. There are also year-round opportunities for suppliers of white aubergine and small purple aubergine (raviya), which are gradually being introduced in the mainstream market.