

NEW COVENT GARDEN MARKET

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<https://www.newcoventgardenmarket.com/blog/guide-bursa-black-figs>

A guide to Bursa Black Figs

The fig is the most revered and ancient of fruit trees – mentioned in the Bible, Koran and Torah. “They are a gift from God,” says one of my hosts.





I'm just back from Turkey, home of the Bursa Black Fig – one of the highlights in New Covent Garden Market at this time of year.

These fruits are second to none – top quality and good value. All are grown in a small area around Bursa, a city which is an hour and a half's ferry journey across the bay from Istanbul.



Demand is booming for the fruit. Exports have more than doubled in the last decade to around 15,000-16,000 tonnes this year, with Britain as a key market.

They are even more popular in Turkey. On the day that I leave, we see a poster advertising a fig festival in nearby town, combined with bouts of traditional oil wrestling.



The Bursa region is stunning: a region of sun-soaked steep hills looking out onto the Sea of Marmara.

95% of black figs in Turkey are produced in this relatively small geographical area by a patchwork of small growers.

Around 40 villages focus on the crop; with around 10 of these producing 70-80% of total volume.



Alara is a key player: the largest fresh fig exporter in the world and the largest cherry exporter in Europe. They work with 188 contracted fig growers in the region.

(The Turkish cherry season runs from May to early August; figs from around mid-August to mid-October.)

Growing figs is a tricky business. “It’s really unbelievable biology – the synchronicity is marvellous,” explains Dr. Salih Çalı, an agricultural engineer and guide for my trip.



The fig tree produces multiple harvests of ripe fruit. So the growers have to pick the trees by hand at least half a dozen times per season. No pesticides and herbicides are used in the orchards.



Most intriguingly, the fig tree boasts a remarkable and unique biology. The fruit is, biologically speaking, actually not a single fruit at all but more than a thousand tiny fruits – the structures that look like seeds inside – which are attached to the inside of the fruit casing, called a “syconium”.

Then there’s the flabbergasting pollination process. I won’t explain it in too much detail (you can find out more [here](#)). But suffice to say that pollination is via a specific flying insect, like a tiny wasp, that flies from

the male fig fruit through a tiny hole into the female fruit. Farmers typically hang male fruit in the female trees to aid this process.



Out in the orchards, grower Halil Ayaz tells me that he can smell when his female trees are ready to be pollinated. He's picking the trees with his wife Ayse using special hooked sticks to pull down the higher branches.







We visit a small village nearby, where the growers deliver consignments of fresh figs to satellite purchasing stations, where the figs are preliminary graded.





This is a picture of grower Hakan Turan dropping off a harvest:



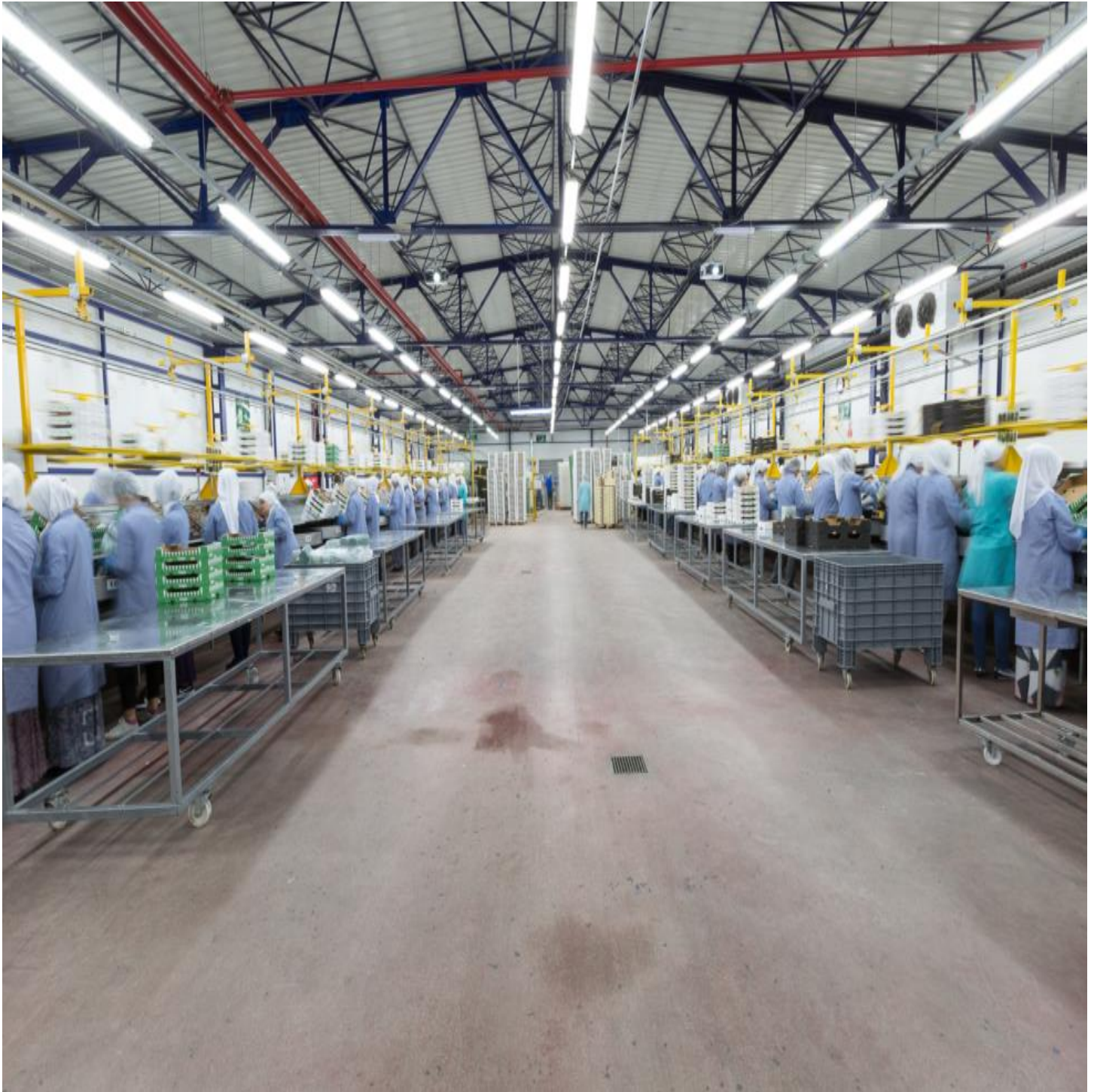


Alara has six main stations around Bursa, which feed the main packing house – the most technologically advanced in the country. State-of-the-art lines process up to 100 tonnes of figs per day.

In the village purchasing house, figs are selected for size, quality and ripeness, with any rejects returned to the grower to sell on the domestic market.



In the main pack house, figs are packed for a wide range of customers – including wholesalers at the market and nearly all the major supermarkets here in Britain.





“We are a step ahead of the other exporters,” says Hakan Gazi, Quality Systems Manager for the company.





Innovations include a quality control system in the pack house which sends on line and real-time assessments of each consignment, which are then sent electronically back to the managers at the purchasing stations.

BÖLGE: 01			KURTLU		CATAK		MERKAR		LEKELI/BASE		AD / YUM		NET	
CLNT	D/B	PRDCT	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2
MO	1,9	20 (O)	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1...	1862
MS	1,0	MSXB (160)	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	898	1068
PNY	1,7	6PUNX4 (27	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	220	224
	3,0	20 (O/Y)	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	2	0	0	1...	1464
RW	3,2	16 (O/Y)	0	0	1	2	0	0	3	0	0	0	1...	2026
	5,2	18 (O/Y)	0	0	2	1	1	1	1	3	0	0	1...	1636
STK	2,0	6PUNX4 (27	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	221	217
	5,0	15PUNX4(27	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	4	0	0	0	173
	6,0	10PUNX500(0	0	1	0	3	0	4	2	0	1	0	0

Sensitech temperature records – digital “spies” – are installed in three locations in their trucks sending temperature readings every two hours by satellite.

The future for Bursa Black Figs looks rosy. But there are challenges ahead.

In the years ahead, it is likely that production in the Bursa region will need to rise to keep up with global demand.

So what next? "When we try and adapt [the Bursa black fig] to other regions we are not having the same success," explains Gazi, referring to the unique topographical features of the area.

But companies such as Alanar, one of Alara's competitors, have been investing heavily in piloting new orchards in other regions of the country.

"Maybe in less than ten years China will be ready for Turkish figs – can you just imagine the demand?" says Hamdi Taner, General Manager at the company.

If companies such as Alanar succeed in producing quality black figs elsewhere, often early or late varieties, this will at least ease the pressure on the Bursa region – but the fruits will never have the same status as the Bursa Black Fig, which is a patented name.

"It's like a diamond, really – it is a very good product," says Taner. These black figs are truly a remarkable fruit. And now is the time to catch them before the season ends.

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