

Photo report: Science and Technology Park of Sicily

includes 13 pictures

Rome - During a recent journey to Sicily, FreshPlaza visited the laboratories of the Science and Technology Park of Sicily (STPS), where many research projects are realized in collaboration with the University of Catania. The aim of the Park is to offer its competence to the small and large industries, especially to the agro-business enterprises. The Park is located in the industrial area of the Sicilian town Catania and the research projects are coordinated by the president of the Park professor Antonino Felice Catara.



^^^ *Research into the Tristeza virus*

Some of the most important projects of the Park regard the citrus cultivation, mainly oranges, which is typical for the Catania area. The researchers have obtained important results in this field, for example improving the organic conservation of citrus fruit or identifying the genes involved in the ripening process of red oranges. But the most promising research is that of the creation of high density citrus orchards by means of a selected viroid inoculation, which has a dwarfing effect on the orange trees ([related FreshPlaza article](#)). This last project has awakened the interest of the Chinese orange producers in the Hunan regio, one of the most important agricultural areas of China.

Professor Catara explains: "Hunan is the first producer of rice and the third producer of citrus in the world. There we will start with an experimental orchard of dwarfish orange trees. The first investment amounts about 5 mln euro and we are very confident for a positive development of this collaboration. In China we have found a great dynamism and an interesting potential for the creation of a scientific and industrial partnership."

During the visit to the laboratories, FreshPlaza has also talked with the researcher Virgilio Giannone, who is conducting a program for some process innovation in the ready-to-use fresh vegetables. Virgilio explained that the research has focused on 23 cultivars of lettuce and 8 fennels, in order to check out the most suitable ones to obtain a longer shelf-life. He says: "We have chosen 6 cultivar of lettuce and 3 fennels and we have obtained a five days longer shelf life, up to 11 days of total maintenance period. We have succeeded thanks to new treatment methods such as the use of new air mix and of new "active" packagings. Our aim is that to present, in the first months of 2007, a complete operating manual for those industries which are interested in the development of the ready-to-use market."

The Science and Technology Park of Sicily will create a specific web portal for the agro-business sector in the next months, in order to offer its competence in an organic way, presenting the different activities of the Park as precious resources for the entrepreneurial world.



The Science and Technology Park of Sicily is located in the industrial area of Catania and it is provided with well-equipped laboratories. It offers its competence to the small and large industries.



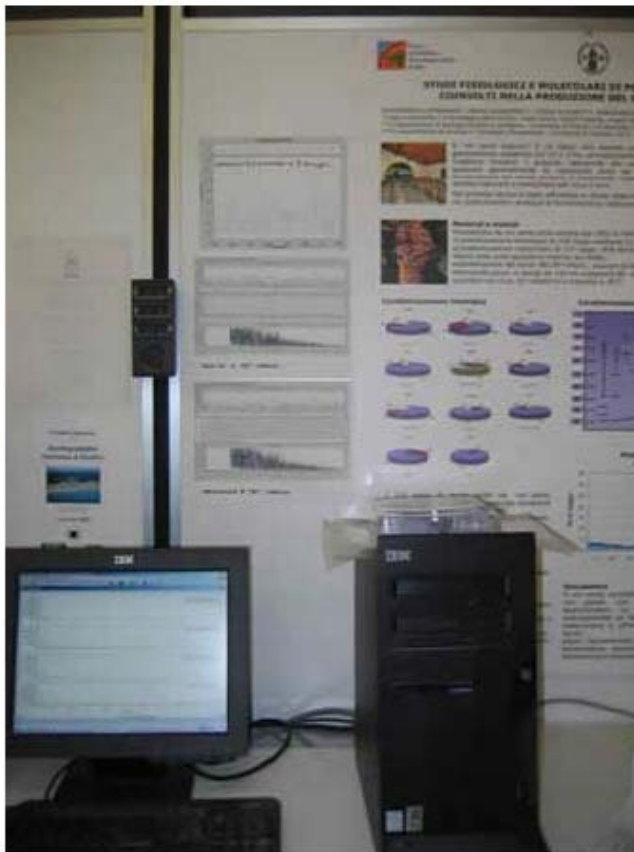
One of the main research areas of the STP of Sicily concerns the fresh produce industry, where the researchers are active on many fields, from projects for a better protection of citrus fruit against diseases, to new technologies for the ready-to-use fresh foodstuffs.



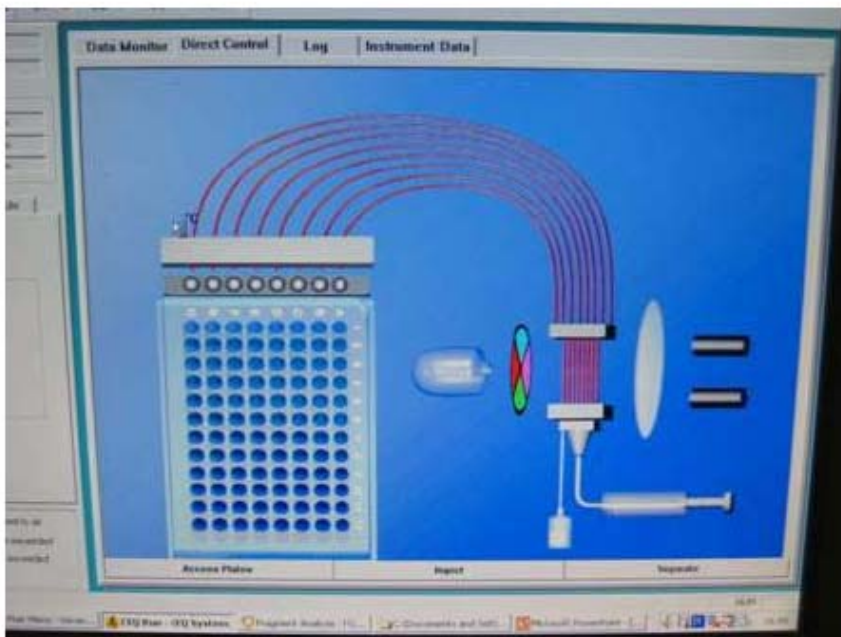
Inside one of the laboratories.



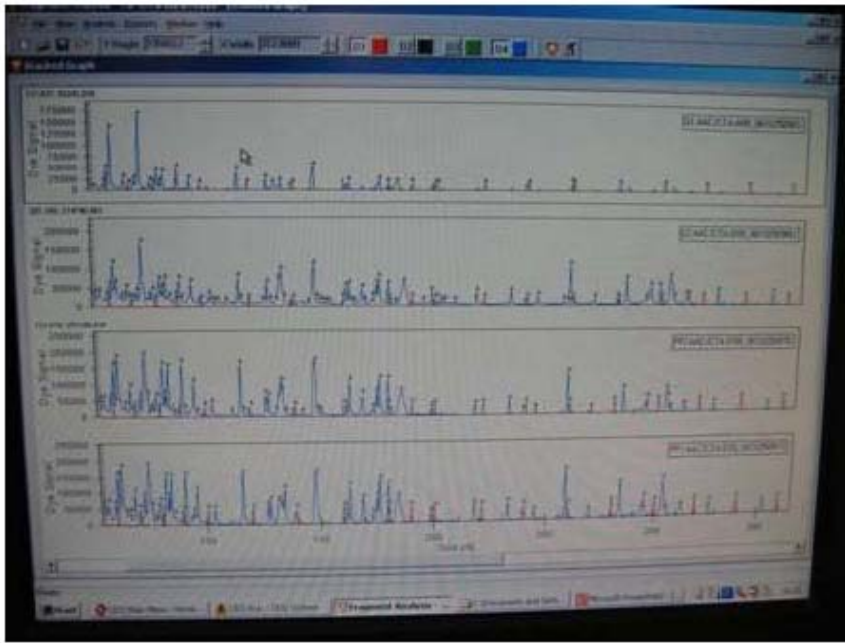
The Science and Technology Park of Sicily works in collaboration with the University of Catania. Its laboratories are the center of many research projects.



Here is the laboratory for the genetic identification of fruit and vegetable varieties, a service which the Park offers to interested firms.



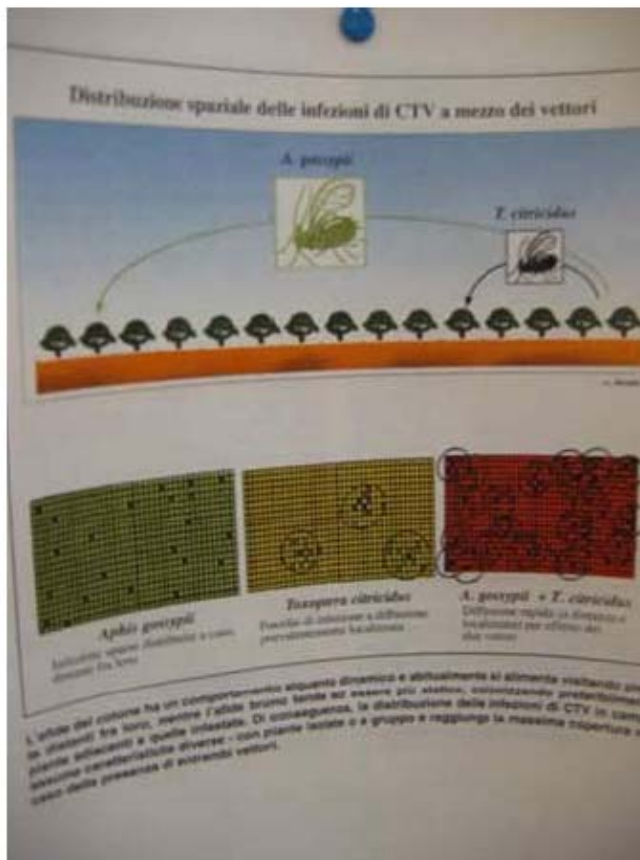
A model of the identification process. A sample is divided into its genetic components in order to obtain its own "fingerprint".



Each genetic element is analyzed and compared to other samples in order to check out the differences. The procedure is very quick and a final report is obtainable in two weeks.



The Science and Technology Park of Sicily has activated a research project about the citrus disease "Tristeza", which is one of the most dangerous for the orange cultivation.



A draft illustrates how "Tristeza" can be propagated by two different kinds of aphids.



If an orchard is hit by "Tristeza", there is no other way than to eradicate it and to plant it again.



The researcher Serena Rizza is trying to isolate the gene which is responsible for the dwarfing effect of a citrus viroid. The dwarfish citrus trees appear in fact to be resistant against "Tristeza". This research has obtained a great interest by the Chinese growers of the Hunan regio.



Professor Antonino Catara, the Park president, shows some essential instruments: two Chinese-English dictionaries which are used by the Italian researchers in order to communicate with their Chinese partners.



Two young researchers showing the first tests of a new project which will enrich plants with useful genes, such as those which improve the plant resistance against molds or which potentiate the photosynthesis process.

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