

INNOVATION SERIES

BUSINESS PROFILE



AGRO EXPRESS

BENIN

[HTTPS://FR-FR.FACEBOOK.COM/
AGROEXPRESSBJ/](https://fr-fr.facebook.com/agroexpressbj/)

ABOUT AGRO EXPRESS

- Company status: created in 2013
- Number of employees: 16



**Euphrasie Dassoundo,
Founder and Director General**

Euphrasie Dassoundo is the Director General of Agro Express, a company specialising in processing of fruit and vegetables, established in 2013. Euphrasie is a marketing and international trade technician, and is passionate about entrepreneurship. She aims to support the empowerment and social development of local communities, especially for women and young people.

In 2020, Euphrasie won the Game Changers - Women in Agriculture Award of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) hosted by the German International Cooperation Agency (GIZ). The award acknowledges Euphrasie's positive impact on rural development and contribution to achieve zero hunger by 2030 (Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) n°2).

Euphrasie has followed numerous training courses to develop her knowledge in entrepreneurship, including in 2020 the "SME Business Loop" training. Euphrasie is also a qualified trainer to support out-of-school youth with their professional retraining, sharing her knowledge and experience.

BUSINESS MODEL

Mission: to contribute to reducing post-harvest losses affecting Beninese producers by offering quality products and employing women and young people from local communities.

Agro Express was created in 2013, when Euphrasie saw women throwing away unsold tomatoes at the end of a market. The seasonality of tomato

production, combined with the limited capacity in Benin to process fruit and vegetables, result in an overabundance of tomatoes during the harvest period. This leads to producers having to lower their selling prices, or even to throw away their production when unsold. Agro Express aims to fight this problem by adding value to local products, thus avoiding food and financial losses,

This series of events is organised by the PAFO and the COLEACP. COLEACP operates within the framework of the development cooperation between the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS) and the European Union, with the support of the French Development Agency.



as well as contributing to food security. The company processes fruit and vegetables mainly into purees, adding value to local production and extending its shelf life.

Since the creation of Agro Express, demand for its products has increased as Beninese consumers appreciate their quality and convenience.

Agro Express is a pioneering agri-food processing company in Benin because it was created and is run by a woman, while the agricultural sector is still predominantly male.

Agro Express products are sold on the local market, in many supermarkets and local shops, and on regional markets (e.g. in Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso and Niger).

STRONG RELATIONSHIPS WITH SMALLHOLDERS

Agro Express sources its raw materials directly from local producers during the harvest season for tomatoes, and throughout the year for other fruit and vegetables (e.g. garlic and ginger).

The company has contributed to structuring a network of tomato producers in the commune of Kpomassè, where agricultural activity depends heavily on tomatoes. The company is committed to buy all of the community's crops in order to ensure access to the market and thus financial security.

PRODUCTS AND MARKETS

Agro Express processes fruit, vegetables and spices into pre-cooked and ready-to-eat purees and concentrates, which are marketed under the brand Xpress.

The company uses pasteurisation as a production method to guarantee its products' quality and its consumers' health. The products do not contain

any additives or preservatives, and are packaged in glass jars that enable a one-year shelf life.

The company's flagship product is tomato puree, sold in 350 g or 1.5 kg jars. Agro Express also produces garlic and onion puree, ground ginger, peanut paste, spice mixes and marinades, as well as zomi, a palm nut oil.





Agro Express produces and distributes its products itself.

INNOVATIONS: MILESTONES AND EXPANSION PLANS

Agro Express was initially financed by its own funds. Subsequent investments could be made following the positive business development, and the award of a 700,000 CFA francs cash prize for the company's second place in the Get in the Ring Cotonou competition in 2020. These investments enabled the company to increase its initial production capacity from about 120 kg to 0.5 tonnes per day, amounting to between 800 and 1,000 jars of puree.

Since its inception, Agro Express has also increased the number of outlets selling its products from one to about 50 in 2019.

Agro Express plans to continue to expand its business, recruiting six new employees over the next two years. The company also wants to expand its network of suppliers of fresh fruit and vegetables.

Over the next two years, the company also aims to package its tomato and spice purees in aluminium tubes lids, in order to sell its products

at a lower cost than its current products in glass jars, and to allow them to be stored outside the refrigerator after opening.

SUCCESS FACTORS AND LESSONS LEARNED

The success of Agro Express is based on the quality of its products, and on their promotion. The company participates in fairs and exhibitions, and makes extensive use of social networks to promote its business and products, reaching a wide audience in various countries. Its products are also available for sale on its Facebook online shop.

The intensive use of social networks also includes the video-sharing application TikTok, through which Agro Express offers video recipes made from its products.

Since its creation, Agro Express has been developing trusting relationships with local producers and rural communities, employing their members, especially women and young people. The company generates reliable sources of income for its employees.

Agro Express also contributes to food safety in Benin and neighbouring countries by transforming fresh fruit and vegetables into storable products, preventing waste and allowing them to be consumed outside the harvest periods.

The positive economic and social impacts of Agro Express have been recognised by several awards. In 2019, the company came second in the Beninese start-up competition Get in the Ring Cotonou. The following year, the company was a finalist in the 1,000 Entrepreneurs Challenge organised in the context of the 28th Africa-France Summit by the Secretariat General of the Africa-France Summit and Digital Africa. In 2020, Euphrasie, as Director General of Agro Express, won the Game Changers - Women in Agriculture award. More recently, the company was nominated in the food category of the ADICOMAWARDS, which rewards digital creativity in French-speaking Africa in the framework of the ADICOMDAYS (Africa Digital Communication Days).



Finalist in the Get in the Ring Cotonou 2019 competition