

From a former serious producer of fertilizers, Serbia, as a country proud of its agriculture, has become a serious importer. Of the former seven factories, only the one in Sabac still produces goods without which there are no good yields in the fields.

The largest of them, Pancevo-based Azotara, after several years of bankruptcy, got a new owner last year who announced the start of production, but to this day this has not happened. In a situation when the price of artificial fertilizers has jumped significantly due to the war in Ukraine, the current reliance on imports may have a negative impact on agricultural production in Serbia, experts warn.

Namely, hundreds of tons of mineral fertilizer are already waiting for the next sowing in the warehouse of the agricultural farm in Chennai. The manager of the Chenj Agrar estate, Miroslav Vlaović, explains that they consume up to 600 tons of fertilizers on their fields. Since Russia and Belarus are the main producers of potassium in the world, it is clear to him that the current situation, where the price of fertilizers has reached the figure of 900 euros per ton, can only become more complicated.

“Because of the possibility of procuring fertilizer, whether it will be there at all, and we believe that the price will not go down, we decided to procure it earlier. Now in May 2022, we have procured almost all fertilizer for production in 2023,” Vlaovic said.

Two years without the use of mineral fertilizers, he says, would significantly affect the yield. Farmers who avoided using it in the previous sowing due to the high price, and fail to procure it for the next one, will have, he estimates, up to 50 percent less results in the fields.

“We can reduce maybe a little, so based on the fact that we used to work well and fertilize, we can save, but we cannot exclude fertilizers in the long run, because that will cost us yield, and yield is profit,” Vlaovic added.

### **Who produces in Serbia**

It is estimated that between one million and 200 and one million and 400 tons of mineral fertilizer should be consumed in Serbia annually. NPK and nitrogen fertilizers are used equally, and only one group is produced in Serbia.

After the bankruptcy of HIP Azotara in Pancevo, the only domestic producer of NPK fertilizers remained the company Elixir Group. In addition to domestic production, these fertilizers are also imported from Russia and other countries, while nitrogen fertilizers depend entirely on imports, which rely mainly on Russian producers.

The Elixir group for Euronews Serbia states that the war in Ukraine affected the growth of prices, and that the logistics of supply were difficult and slow.

“The rise in the price of mineral fertilizers was started even before the crisis in Ukraine. The trigger was the energy crisis and the rise in energy prices, which triggered a rise in the price of all raw materials for the production of mineral fertilizers. The current geopolitical situation has brought a new “We have provided all raw materials and production for the

autumn season is proceeding according to plan. For end users, this means that there will be enough NPK fertilizers in Serbia for autumn sowing,” the company said in a statement.

### **The question of price**

However, the question is at what price that fertilizer will be available. Former director of the Institute of Field Farming and associate professor at the Faculty of Agriculture in Novi Sad, Miroslav Malešević, says that fertilizer stocks should be considered in time, ie that there must be enough for September and October. He also believes that it is not good to be completely dependent on imports.

“If we do not have our own factory in the foreseeable future, which would meet at least 30 to 40 percent of the needs, then we will fall with our production and that will leave long-term consequences,” says Malešević.

When they bought Pancevo-based Azotara for 650 million dinars last year, the leaders of the company Promist announced that they would restart the plants for the production of liquid fertilizer. However, how far they have come with the realization of these plans is a question that, among other things, they were not willing to answer, Euronews reports.