

PRESS KIT
1969 -2009 – 40th anniversary of Rungis

3 March 1969
Official opening of Rungis Market, World
Fresh Produce Capital of the World



Innovating and defending our values

Forty years ago, Rungis held its first market day on 3 March 1969. This major event was another milestone in a long history that began 800 years ago and continues today.

Since the 12th century, the central food market at Les Halles de Paris had successfully filled its role of supplying Paris, a role that undoubtedly ranks as a public service.

Rungis International Market naturally marked a new era, since the traditional function as a wholesale market for a regional clientele – a key step for a distribution channel independent of mass distribution – gradually expanded to encompass a function as an international hub serving gastronomy and France's food heritage.

The Market tenants and Semmaris therefore managed to develop this tool and adapt it to the modern world. This change has been marked by the joint stamp of innovation and defence of our values.

We innovate by introducing new products, finding new supply sources and proposing new services adapted to our customers' needs.

We defend our values by our insistence on quality, food safety, freshness, taste and respecting seasons.

This dual concern will continue to drive all those who work at Rungis International Market as it has always been in the past. Their conviction and enthusiasm are the foundation for the long-term development of the Market and its operators.

Marc Spielrein
Chairman and CEO

The move of the century

Initially scheduled to be in Valenton, the Rungis site was chosen by the Prime Minister of the time, Mr Michel Debré, to meet some very specific criteria:

- a place with vast empty spaces, easy to build on,
- a crossroads between major road, rail and air transport systems, with easy access for Parisian and provincial buyers and sellers and delivery of goods.

The move was decided by General de Gaulle in 1959 and entrusted to Mr Libert Bou, Vice-President of the permanent committee for public interest markets (MIN), who became the first chairman of Rungis and its surrounding areas.

The works began in 1964, with the building of the Fresh Fish pavilion, nine fruit and vegetable pavilions, four dairy and poultry pavilions, the cut flowers pavilion and the administrative centre.

For the opening, roughly 30 bars, tobacconists and brasseries were up and running, along with 5 petrol stations, an SNCF freight train station, a medical-social centre, a police station, a hairdresser, etc.

Furthermore, after 10 years of major works, the road network was adapted to the future needs of trade users of Rungis. For example, the RN7 trunk road from Porte d'Italie was expanded, an additional lane with direct access was created on the A6 motorway and the Belle-Epine interchange was built.

The transfer from the central Les Halles de Paris to Rungis, called the "move of the century", was finally ready to go, from 27 February to 3rd March, 1969.

This involved about 20,000 people, 1,000 wholesale companies, 10,000 m³ of equipment, 5,000 tons of goods, 10,000 boxes of flowers and 1,500 trucks taking to the road. Originally, the plan was to get the army to carry out this operation, but after consulting the people concerned, it was decided that each wholesaler should handle their own move.

The wholesalers in cut flowers and the potted plant producers led the procession on Thursday 27 February, after their market, taking almost 10,000 boxes of flowers and plants with them. They were followed at 7 am on Friday 28th by fruit and vegetables and over 2,000 tons of goods; next came the dairy wholesalers' wave with 1,500 tons of products. Finally, the sea and freshwater products with 300 tons of fish were the last to leave Les Halles de Paris on 1st March.

Despite the numbers of people involved and the goods transported, the 'move of the century' went off smoothly and Rungis Market was able to open on schedule, on Monday 3rd March, 1969, the first day of market for the flowers. The other product sectors waited until Tuesday, 4th March.

Rungis – French gastronomy and food heritage

Rungis International Market is 40 years old. It is the largest fresh produce market in the world, notably due to its modernity, but also because of its know-how and traditions, some over 800 years old! Here's the story..

ANTIQUITY

5th century

At the time there was a Paris market called the "Palu" (or Palud) market, established on Ile de la Cité. It was transferred to the right bank of Seine, to Place de Grève (now Hôtel de Ville), for greater safety when the Seine flooded.

MIDDLE AGES

1135

Louis VI (the Fat) bought from the bishop of Paris some marshy lands outside the city at a place "Les Champeaux", at the junction of the roads leading to the rich provinces of the North and the coast (now Rue Saint Denis and Rue Montmartre).

1441

Louis VII, the king who protected tradesmen against church clerics, allowed the bourgeois of Paris to set up at Les Champeaux.

1181

Philippe Auguste transferred the "Saint Lazare" fair. The merchants took over the marshes and market gardeners started cultivating the surrounding land.

1183

Philippe Auguste had two wooden buildings built to house the trading activities. From then on, this covered market was named "Les Halles" by Parisians. In those days, it was still a market that essentially handled non food products.

1190

Philippe Auguste has a compound build that integrated the market into the city, which was to last some 780 years. The site now closed up at night. The merchants contributed to the cost by a rental fee and a tax on sales.

Mid 13th century

Louis IX had three new buildings built, including one for auctioning fresh fish. Les Halles became the largest market of the capital. It opened up to provincial merchants (Picardie, Champagne and Flandres in particular). It was by now a food market providing a wholesale function to supply Paris.

1284

Philippe le Hardi built several buildings for the "little people", so they could then start trading.

1368

The Market was open three days a week.

End 14th century

Despite the royal decrees forcing merchants to set up at Les Halles, the market went into a decline in favour of trading through boutiques, set up in the city to avoid taxes.

MODERN ERA

1543

1st refurbishment of Les Halles

François I^{er} had the existing buildings pulled down and rebuilt new ones using an ordered plan. Around Les Halles various boutique houses were built to serve as storerooms and housing for merchants. They were called the "Piliers des Halles". The works began under **François I^{er}**, continued under **Henri II** and were completed in the reign of **Henri III**.

Previously weekly, the market now operated every day. A bread market and a cheese, egg and butter market were opened. By now, the Les Halles market only dealt in foodstuffs.

1720

To make some space, the plant market was moved to the Quai de la Mégisserie; only cut flowers remained at Les Halles. The wheat market was moved and built on its final location; it became the commodity exchange.

1785

The Cimetière des Innocents cemetery was moved south of Paris, creating space for the herb and vegetables market (large vegetables, garlic, onions, bay leaves).

CONTEMPORARY ERA

1811

Napoleon I, out of concern for "urban health", as well as the capital's food supplies, expressed the wish to reorganize this space to make it a central Paris location, extending from the wheat market up to the Innocents market.

The reconstruction of Les Halles was included in the plan to refurbish the city. The works should have been completed but political events put a premature end to this plan.

1818

The administration of the Hospices won the right to build three wooden sheds to house the meat products (wholesale cooked meats, poultry, game, tripe). This was the start of the "Prouvaires" market, shortly joined by the potato market known as the "Légat" market.

1848

Rambuteau, the Prefect of the Seine, created a Les Halles Commission, appointed to decide whether to leave Les Halles in the existing location or move it. The plan by architects **Victor Baltard** and **Félix Callet** proposing a redevelopment was adopted.

1853

The first building was devoted to meat sales. This stone building proved heavy, massive, poorly adapted to sales. It was named the "Fort des Halles". On 3rd June 1853, **Louis Napoleon Bonaparte** suspended the works. The roofing for the Innocents market was abandoned and the market was destroyed.

Second half of 1853

Under the iron fist of Baron **Hausmann**, **Victor Baltard** prepared a second plan with a completely metal framework; it was an engineer's plan rather than an architect's plan. Between 1853 and 1870, ten pavilions, six on the east and four on the west, divided by an aisle under a glass roof, were built.

1900

17,000 tons of fruit and vegetables transited through Les Halles, 678,000 tons in 1949.

1925 and 1929

The Paris city council refused to divide the market and move it to the outskirts of Paris.

1943

During the German occupation, the national Resistance committee, chaired by Georges Bidault, considered moving Les Halles.

1948

The idea was again raised under the term "market-station". The idea was to move Les Halles to just outside Paris. The economic council rejected this idea, "for general reasons", requiring a central location.

1953

Traffic and access problems, poor hygiene and working conditions, the growth of sales outside of the pavilions and the growing number of intermediaries, rendered everything more complex and ultimately contributed to the sharp rise in distributions costs.

Moreover, by 1950, trade circuits were shorter, imports were growing, often using other channels and other locations. The central Les Halles markets no longer fulfilled their role as a fair confrontation between supply and demand.

An interdepartmental committee therefore decided to build a network of so-called public interest markets aimed at simplifying transactions and assuring the transparency of commercial operations. The sharing of data should result in the emergence of a virtual national wholesale market.

The process started in the provinces, where the old markets were moved slightly closer to the outskirts, while following strict criteria (rail link, enclosed market, internal rules type, knowledge of deliveries and prices).

Paris would follow this schema.

6 January 1959: Decree No. 59-44

The Prime Minister, **Michel Debré**, confirmed the transfer of Les Halles.

December 1959

Choice of site - **Rungis**.

1961

Libert Bou appointed as commissioner in charge of developing the public interest market for the Paris region.

1962

Semmaris is created

1969

The Baltard pavilions are now empty. Their demolition began in 1971 despite a torrent of protests.

3 March 1969

Official opening of Rungis Market.

Accounts from old hands still in business

Rungis is also and above all the men and women who hand down from generation to generation the knowledge and love of the product, turning a profession into a passion. Here are some accounts from old hands still in business:

Antoine D'Agostino (Manager of La Cave de Rungis – wine wholesaler)

"I came to Rungis on 3 March 1969, as a retail buyer in fruit and vegetables and I only became a wholesaler of Rungis Market in 1988. The move was done in a weekend and we used to say at the time that it was the equivalent of the Normandy landings.

Rungis had to be built because at Les Halles de Paris you couldn't even move around on foot and everything was done manually. Today, there are docks, pallet trucks, logistics platforms, computer systems. We witnessed the arrival of new products like the lychee or kiwi. The clientele has really expanded and people come from far away, even from abroad. Rungis also made an important contribution to the development of off-season produce thanks to air transport. Rungis is the largest fresh produce wholesale market in the world, which is confirmed when you visit other wholesale markets abroad. In forty years, Rungis has changed for the better and it is still exemplary."

Daniel Archenault (Manager of André Gilles – meat wholesaler processor)

"I came to Rungis in 1969, at age 22, to create the company André Gilles. Mr Gilles owned a large abattoir in the Vendée region and had great faith in Rungis. My father Jules was a pork butcher and bought pigs from him for his abattoir in Villiers-sur-Marne.

From 1969 to 1973, it wasn't easy because we were the only ones in our sector and we faced competition from La Villette. In 1973, with the arrival of meat products from La Villette at Rungis, things changed overnight and it really took off. All the butchers, delicatessens and caterers came to Rungis. Several elements were positive for Rungis, particularly the traceability of products and the food safety measures, the Euro which was a progress for import and export, the improvement of the Market's infrastructure making Rungis an exceptional platform that groups all products in one location."

Maurice Baleux (Honorary president of the fruit and vegetable wholesalers' federation)

"I started in 1951 at Les Halles de Paris and I arrived in Rungis on 3 March 1969. Our company was located in the B2 pavilion of the fruit and vegetables sector. For us professionals, the first great innovation was computers, with the first electronic invoicing machines, as well as modern communication systems (telephone, telex, fax, etc.).

At Rungis, we managed to develop our activity in the provinces and abroad whereas in the past we were limited to produce from Ile-de-France. Here, we saw the arrival of new produce like exotic fruit or even tomato lines (with Savéol, for whom I was the chairman of the economic interest group at Rungis). And France discovered these products thanks to Rungis. With this opening to the world, our business changed. The professionals really developed international exchanges a lot, because the infrastructures were perfectly adapted, and the services too (deliveries). Lastly, the refrigeration of the pavilions, the traceability, selection and quality of the produce helped Rungis become a benchmark."

Maurice Desailly (Chairman of Desailly – dairy produce wholesaler)

"Created at Les Halles de Paris by my grandfather, the company dates back to 1935. At the time we were forwarding agents and brokers. I joined the business in October 1956 and we arrived in Rungis on 3 March 1969. The move from Les Halles de Paris to Rungis went very smoothly, but the facilities were not completely finished. Other than our large traditional clientele, at that time we also supplied mass distribution, which was beginning to expand.

Unloading platforms, computerization, refrigeration and product traceability number among the important advantages of Rungis. These innovations allowed Rungis Market to 'breathe' and grow. We used to have 250 listed products at Les Halles de Paris, while we now have about 2,000 today. Furthermore, Rungis is a centralized market with an essential role in the retail trade. Naturally, all this also helped our own company's growth because without Rungis we wouldn't be here today."

Guy Eschaliér (Manager of Mécarungis – central cashier for the meat pavilion)

"The meat products arrived in Rungis in January 73, when they were supposed to be to La Villette. In fact, as the number of animals had dropped sharply, the La Villette project was abandoned. The working conditions were much better at Rungis, because the facilities provided were more modern (overhead pulley system, lifts, etc.). After the BSE crisis (bovine spongiform encephalopathy) in 1996, we had to upgrade to meet European standards. The VIP building was then completely renovated and operational by June 2000 (cold chain, compliance with food hygiene and safety standards). As of 1997, the traceability of carcasses had been introduced with the meats labelled (barcodes) upstream (farm). The work stations were equipped with weighing machines that allowed you to print the barcode labels and sales terminals with optical scanners hooked up to the Mécarrungis central cashier, so that all the data was copied onto the invoices issued for our members. Lastly, we developed different services such as delivery and international exchanges."

Gérard François

(Chairman and founder of Plantassistance, plant producer - horticulture sector - Rungis)

"Horticulture came to Rungis in March 1969. Here, with the rapid introduction of standards, the working conditions were much better than at Les Halles de Paris. I became a shareholder of Semmaris from the start because I felt it was only normal to assist this new organization. On my arrival, I had 54 m² in the CoA building and 20 m² under the C1. At the time, the sector numbered over three hundred professionals. In 1981, the companies were divided by two types of activity: the cut flowers activity and potted plants activity. Then, as of 1991, the potted plant wholesaler category was introduced. Afterwards I managed to set up my huge greenhouse. With over 2,000 listed products, this huge building under controlled temperature of 4,500 m² fitted floor space is perfectly adapted to the plants' material requirements and, for me, it represents a huge improvement. Today, no market in the world can propose as many quality products as Rungis, which is a benchmark, specialized and increasingly cutting edge market. Forty years later, Rungis has met the challenge successfully."

Celebrations programme 2009

The 40th anniversary, launched on 27 November 2008, will be celebrated throughout 2009 by a large number of events and shows organized by Semmaris – the market authority – and Stratégie Gourmet – the promotional organization of Rungis wholesalers.

- ➔ 3 March 2009: "Family" party bringing together tenants' managing directors and employees of the Market for a very festive dinner, with an exceptional show of the Paris Crazy Horse, at Espace Rungis.
- ➔ April to September 2009: educational actions for school children
 - taste workshops at Rungis for fifth and sixth year primary classes in Ile-de-France,
 - creation of a learning-fun space in the hall of Rungis Tower (learning path, video room),
 - Market tour for about 7,000 students training for the food and catering business.
- ➔ April 2009: picture exhibition "Les Gueules de Rungis" (Rungis faces) on the Market walls.
- ➔ March to June 2009: "*Fête du Frais*" "fresh products party" in the pavilions
- ➔ 23 - 25 September 2009: meeting of the World Union of Wholesale Markets and the 4th Entretiens de Rungis, on the theme: "*What is the future of wholesale markets?*"

Rungis in figures

The largest market in the world, with a turnover of **7.6 billion euros**

A city within the city, spanning **232** hectares, less than **7** km from Paris

1.5 million tons of incoming food product

18 million consumers supplied including 11 million in Ile-de-France

Over 1,200 companies established (wholesalers, producers, brokers, logistics, central purchasing agencies, service providers)

A major employment pool with **about 12,000** employees

A diversified activity:

- 50% of clients are in the retail trade in markets or stores, 35% in the catering business and 15% large and medium-sized supermarkets.
- 60% of sales are made directly at the Market and 40% by delivery.
- 65% of sales are for Ile-de-France, 25% for the provinces and 10% for export.

26,000 entries per day on average at the Market toll gates.

Orly Rungis, **2nd largest business centre** in Ile-de-France after La Défense.

Rungis: **81%** instant awareness by the French, **83%** positive image (TNS SOFRES).

Press contact

Image 7

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