

Russian Sanctions Inspire Mass Tomato Fight in Central Amsterdam

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Hundreds of young Dutch men and women turned Amsterdam's central Dam square into a blizzard of red goop on Sunday, as they pelted each other mercilessly with overripe tomatoes.

In theory, the event was set up as a protest against Russian sanctions blocking imports of European fresh produce. In practice, most participants turned out to experience the joy of smacking a loved one — or total stranger — with tomato pulp at close range.

The idea was lifted from Spain's famed annual "La Tomatina" festival in Bunol.

"It was hard in there. It was mean. But it was fun," said a beaming Lois Bloedjes, who came with her sister Sil. "Everything became one big pile of mush. There were people swimming in it on the ground."

Sil described the smell in the mush pit as "awful" and "somewhat like beer," but the tomatoes that actually got in her mouth — "the taste was actually not bad."

Tickets to the one-hour fight cost 15 euros (\$18) each and around 1,000 were sold.

Organizer Joep Verbunt said proceeds will go to tomato growers hurt by the sanctions.

The Netherlands vies with Mexico as the world's largest tomato exporter, and it sent \$100 million worth to Russia last year. Dutch farmers have been offered a subsidy to either dispose of excess crops or donate them to food banks.

Dam in Amsterdam kleurt rood na tomatengevecht <http://t.co/S38dg3ZNJD>
pic.twitter.com/JYYvBXlbbI

— NU.nl (@NUnl) [September 14, 2014](#)

Verbunt purchased 120,000 tomatoes labeled unfit for human consumption for the event.

With music pumping from a podium, the participants — most of whom were wearing white before the fight started — counted down from 10 to zero. Then a shipping container full of the fruit was emptied into the arena.

The area was fenced off to prevent casual passers-by from being hit — but many tried to climb the fences or peer inside to see what was happening.

The leftover tomato sludge will be cleaned and sent to a biogas production facility.

"It was beautiful," said participant Dennis de Jong, who exited the arena with tomato chunks in his hair, down his pants, and even a few bits stinging his eyes where they had seeped in past the swimming goggles he wore for protection. "They have to do this every year."

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