

ARGENTINA

Top fruit export to Chinese market promising

Argentina's Agricultural Concierge in China highlighted the potential for exports of pears and apples to China in a report released by the Argentina Chamber of Exporters (CERA).



The study warned that the growth the import of these products had recorded has "caught the attention of the world's fruit exporters to enter this market."

Last year, Chile, New Zealand and France were the exclusive suppliers of apples for China, while pear shipments arrived from the United States, Mexico and Belgium.

This scenario, coupled with the signing of the Phytosanitary Protocol for the Export of Apples and Pears from Argentina to China, which was signed on July 18 between the Argentinean Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries and the Chinese General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine during the recent visit of President Xi Jinping, will allow Argentine producers to become a part of the small club of suppliers of these fruits in China.

In 2013, China imported 38,724 tons of fresh apples worth \$67.3 million, 37 and 27% less than in 2012, respectively, due to "the temporary suspension of imports for health reasons and the decrease of spendings on gifts from public officials during national holidays," according to a report of Argentina's embassy in China.

In the same period, imports of pears amounted to 3,766 tons worth \$6.9 million dollars, i.e. 52 and 82 %more, respectively, than in 2012.

BELGIUM

Better price and shelf life through hydro cooling

This season, the cherries marketed through BelOrta in Borgloon, Belgium, are hydro-cooled by the auction itself. The auction also invested in an electronic sorting system for cherries. A large investment, in accord with the future vision of the auction, explains Jos Craemers. "We see the cherry acreage increasing all around us," says Jos. "Especially the new varieties are expanding rapidly. The investment in hydro-cooling and sorting therefore represents an important added value for the region."

Cherries before hydro-cooling

Both cherry consumption and the fruits themselves are affected by the weather. "Cherries are, broadly speaking, an impulse purchase. With warm weather you sell more cherries, but the heat also has an impact on shelf life.



The chiller can cool six tons of cherries per hour. In the machine, the cherries literally take a cold shower. "The hydro cooler uses a special system so that the cherries are not bruised by the water," explains Jos. "Subsequently; the cherries enter a cold room with ultrasonic humidification devices. We sort them later in the day."

Better prices and broader application possibilities

The investment in hydro-cooling was particularly attractive, as the cherries that were hydro-cooled generally brought in 50 cents more than the cherries of the same quality and size, which were not

cooled in this way. Moreover, due to the improved shelf life, foreign markets are suddenly within reach.

CHINA

The US cherry deal in China has been a record year for air shipments, as charter services take off

According to the latest market reports Cherry imports are 'flying' in China underlining a surge in airfreight shipments during the US season.

According to Kurt Huang of Shanghai Oheng Import & Export Co, which specialises in customs clearance and logistics service provision in Shanghai, between 7,500 and 8,500 pallets of cherries have been airfreighted from California and the Northwest (Washington and Oregon) during the current season, marking a record year.

China Eastern Airlines, which launched a weekly charter service in June, has shipped around 1,000 pallets on seven flights, Huang estimated. But there have been plenty of shipments with other airlines, capitalising on the frequency of flights between the US and China.

"On 17 July, we handled 282 pallets in one day," said Huang. "There are around 30 days in the season, and we've been averaging daily arrivals of more than 100 pallets."

While airfreighted fruit is traditionally much more expensive than sea freight product, Huang said that the price differential has narrowed because of the frequency of services and the availability of freight space.

"Actually, the airfreighted cherries are not that much more expensive than sea freighted fruit," said Huang. "There are a lot of flights from the US and you can buy space for as little as US\$1-1.5 per kg. It's not like flying fruit from Chile.

"Also, the arrival condition has been very good with no quality issues, so that also makes it cost competitive. The cost difference between air and sea shipments is around RMB60 (US\$9.75) per carton, once you factor in freight and import costs."

According to Huang it had been a reasonable year for Northwest cherries. "There was a period in mid-July when the prices were not good, falling to around RMB260 (US\$42) per [5kg] carton, but it was acceptable because of the big volume coming in."

EU

Call for lift on unfair potato export barriers

A European farm body has called for 'unfair' restrictions on EU potato exports to be lifted.

At a seminar in Brussels last week Copa-Cogeca pointed to the issues producers were facing with sliding prices.

The price pressures are being compounded by the Russian trade embargo and UK farmers are being hit with long-term consumption declines.



Attendees heard a consumption increase in potatoes is expected in the coming years.

But this is likely to be outside Europe, and EU exporters need the removal of tariffs and other restrictions to aid trade with non-EU countries.

Copa-Cogeca secretary general Pekka Pesonen said: "To maintain this stable and sustainable trend in the future, the European Institutions must take the European potato sector seriously, and see it as an offensive sector in bilateral trade negotiations.

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Source: farmersguardian.com

GAZA

Skyrocketing vegetable prices in Gaza drive inflation up

The monthly report issued by the Central Bureau of Statistics which shows a sharp increase in the rates of inflation and the cost of living in the Gaza Strip during the month of July.



Fresh vegetable prices in the Gaza Strip have increased by 50.86%. Aubergines have registered a 318.56% price increase; courgette prices have grown by 300.76%, the price of green chillies increased by 111.77%, and tomatoes have registered 81.29% higher prices.

The conflict has additionally already led to the destruction of about 70% of the cultivated areas, according to a statement issued by the Ministry of Agriculture in Gaza.

With the closure of the Kerem Shalom crossing (the only commercial crossing between the West Bank and Gaza Strip), some of the goods have started disappearing from the local market and there is scarcity of others, prompting prices to rise due to increased demand.

When comparing prices during the month of July 2014 with the month of July 2013, the data indicate average consumer prices to have increased by 2.24%; by 5.04% in the Gaza Strip, 3.91% in Jerusalem, and by 1.07% in the West Bank.

Taking into account the data for the first seven months of 2014, consumer prices have recorded an increase of 1.79% compared with the same period of 2013, with increases of 4.62% in Jerusalem, 2.10% in the West Bank, and 1.96% in the Gaza Strip.

SPAIN

130 million Euro in aid to Canary tomatoes in 5 years

The Canary tomato sector has received 130 million Euro of state aid over the past five years, but the Government has ruled out making aid payments relating to past campaigns, as this possibility "does not seem legally feasible" under EU legislation.

The Congressman of Nueva Canarias (NC) in Congress, Pedro Quevedo, who has issued a written request for information on the latest developments for the "survival of the tomato industry" in the archipelago.

Which in response, the Government estimates that the Canary tomato sector has received some 130 million Euro of aid through various lines of support over the past five years.

However, he argues that after holding "informal contacts" with the European Commission (EC) to find out if state aid payments could be made to compensate for past campaigns, it was concluded that "this does not seem legally feasible."

Onions with better storage capacity and skin retention

The new onion varieties developed by Bayer CropScience are best characterized by better storage and greater retention of the outer skin. It is designed to meet the needs of all operators in the food chain. Large producers and marketers in Spain and Portugal have been the first to see them during the day out organized by the company in the town of Villarrobledo, Spain.

New features introduced by Nunhems substantially improve the marketing possibilities of onions in a longer season,



through better storage after harvest. Specialists of Bayer CropScience Vegetable Seeds have managed to complement this key factor with a better preservation of the outer skin covering the bulb. The end result are varieties that maintain a high standard of quality for longer due to their exceptional post-harvest qualities, not to mention an attractive external appearance, with a bright and deep colour that facilitates product differentiation at the point of sale.

The NUN 7202 ONX F1 stands out for its long shelf life, with very uniform, single centre bulbs, as well as its hardness and very dark skin. With similar characteristics, the company has also launched the NUN 7004 ONX F1; a yellow onion with great potential for storage and an exceptional quality for the processing industry. As for white long day onions, the category where the Nunhems brand has market leadership, the newest variety is the NUN 8003 ONX F1, with very uniform bulbs in size and shape, very white outer layers and really good tolerance to bolting.

USA

Table grape season maintains early start

The early start to this year's table grape season in California has continued this year as harvesting remains ahead of last years' time-table. "It's been interesting to see weather patterns that are happening so early," said Matoian. "We usually don't see some of the weather things that are happening until mid-September, and they're already starting to happen in August." He noted that prices this year have been adequate, with prices ranging from \$14.95 to \$18.95 per box, depending on variety, size and quality.

Further Motoian says, "Demand is good. We're in peak production for green seedless grapes, and in about 10 or 14 days we'll have pretty heavy production for Scarlet Royal grapes, which are a big September variety." A trend he noticed this year has been to move away from Thompson seedless and Crimson seedless grapes, as growers turn to newer varieties that have better yields and are less labor intensive.



"We're probably having one of the earliest starts we've ever had, and we might see an upward trend on pricing at the end of the marketing season," said Matoian. He said that the tree fruit deal might end early, and they won't be competing with tree fruit for market space, so they'll have plenty of room to push and promote grapes.

Date growers hope demand continues to grow

With California's date harvest set to begin next month, growers are hoping that demand for their product continues to grow as it's done over the last several years.



"Demand for dates this past crop year has been good," said Lorrie Cooper of the California Date Administrative Committee. "As each year passes, demand for dates become higher." The growth takes a greater emphasis on healthy eating on the part of consumers. With diabetes on the rise and the ill effects of a bad diet becoming more apparent, people are looking to incorporate more fruits and vegetables into their diet. The sweet taste that dates afford have made dates an attractive product, both fresh and when processed into other food products.

"Consumers are becoming more aware of processed versus natural sugars, as Cooper explained "So consumers are eating more fruits and vegetables. Dates, in the last five years, have also become one of the main ingredients, as natural sweeteners, in fruit bars."

This year's harvest is expected to begin next month, and estimates put state production between 45 million and 50 million pounds for all date varieties. The Coachella Valley grows about 90% of the dates in the United States, with the other 10% grown in the Bard Valley near Yuma, Arizona. Medjool date production is centered in the Bard Valley, while the Coachella Valley's growers produce about 25 varieties of dates.

(CA)Lettuce market strong

Warm weather along California's Central Coast has made for dips in supplies of lettuce. That's resulted in strong prices and a strong market for lettuce coming out of California.

According to Mark McBride of Coastline Produce the market for lettuce has been quite strong, even in spite of the holiday weekend, which has a tendency to disrupt normal movement.

He cited high night temperatures as one of the reasons for the current market. Because lettuce requires a certain difference between temperatures at night and during the day in order to form a solid head of lettuce, the warm nights have disrupted their growth. The last three weeks have brought warm nights, and the lettuce has suffered because of that.

"When there's not enough of a difference between night and day, the lettuce experiences rapid growth and doesn't fill in," explained McBride. "So you get a puffy shell of lettuce, which may look



fine, but doesn't have the usual weight because it hasn't filled in." He noted that this kind of weather usually hits the area later in the year, but because it's arrived earlier which has caused some gaps in production. That, in turn, has led to higher prices.

"We'll have supplies of lettuce from Salinas through the middle of November, and we expect these weather conditions to continue," said McBride. "These conditions will be with us for the rest of the year, so the market will be elevated for quite some time."

California mushroom production in decline

The volume of *Agaricus* mushrooms sold in California took a 14 % dive in the commodity's most recent season, according to a government report.

Producers turned out 102 million pounds of so-called "button" mushrooms in the 2013-2014 season, down from 118,098 pounds a year earlier and 121,354 pounds in 2011-2012, reports the National Agricultural Statistics Service office here.



The value of sales of California mushrooms has slid from \$208.1 million two seasons ago to \$189.6 million this season, according to NASS. However, the average price of \$1.87 per pound is up 7 % from last year, the agency notes.

California accounted for 12 % of the *Agaricus* mushrooms produced nationwide this past season, as the total 882-million-pound U.S. crop was slightly larger than last year. The value of sales nationwide this season was \$1.05 billion, up slightly from last year.

Agaricus bisporus is the most commonly grown mushroom in the United

States, accounting for up to 90 % of mushroom production, according to researchers at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse.

American scientists develop non-allergic peanuts

Nut allergy is a dangerous disease that can be lethal for a person who suffers from it. However the greatest risk is that the product can get into the human body accidentally, without the knowledge of the person. That is why the researchers have begun to look for a solution in the root of the problem: in the nuts themselves.

Instead of looking for another treatment and methods to prevent allergies to peanuts, the Experts of the Ministry of Agriculture in the USA decided to change the purpose and to deprive the peanuts of their potentially dangerous component.

Christopher Mattison, a molecular biologist from the Agricultural Research Service, said that they literally have to break down the structure of nut protein that triggers the allergy.

It has been announced that the scientists were able to successfully add the cashew protein into peanut structure, and this, at least, has reduced the effects of an allergic reaction.

US (CA): Work force cut as prototype proves itself with almond sorting

Brown-skinned almonds pour like a waterfall from one conveyor belt to another and pass under a strip of bright lights. A robotic head poised over the belt waits for any almond-size rocks, twigs or

discoloured nuts to move into range, then darting down, right and left, vacuums up the culls and airlifts them to the reject bin.

The four lines of robotic nut sorters, the first of their kind in California or anywhere else, have allowed nut processor Travaille & Phippen to trim its work force and provide the opportunity to greatly expand production through mechanization.

After installation of the sorters began in September, the goal was to process 100,000 pounds of almonds in a typical 12-hour shift. The machines proved capable of handling up to 150,000 pounds, said David Phippen, a co-owner. And they've displaced a good deal of the manual sorting previously required.

"For Travaille & Phippen, we used to have 80 employees; we have something less than 50 now," Phippen said. Not only did it cut labour costs, but it kept the company from having to meet Affordable Care Act health coverage requirements.

The Travaille system was really the first sorter with hyperspectral vision versus three-colour vision, Pflueger said.

California's almond industry, however, is no place to rest on yesterday's technology.

In the dozen years since 2002, it has doubled total production from 1 billion pounds to 2 billion pounds of nut meats per year. Yield per acre also has risen over the same period, going from an average of less than 2,000 pounds per acre to about 2,400 pound per acre today.

Besides improvements in growing and processing, consumers continue to demand better quality as well as higher food safety standards, Phippen said. ♦

