

Solution to facilitate the export of blueberries

The export of Peruvian and Chilean blueberries has increased steadily in recent years. The sensitivity, permeability and high oxidation capacity of this fruit make the logistical process quite tough. Given that, in most cases, transit times are quite long, there has been increased demand for good preservation techniques, requiring research into new technologies and processes.

Sulphur dioxide (SO₂) is a component that has been used successfully for some time by table grape exporters. Its main property is that it manages to inhibit the development of botrytis (rot) and, in turn, regulates the residue level of sulphites in the fruit.

This component was approved by the European Union four years ago, opening up many possibilities for fruit exporters. "With the growing exports to China and Europe, the preservation time needed has become much greater; there actually tends to be a minimum of 60 days between harvest and consumption. To preserve this fruit effectively for so long, the SO₂ concentration levels have to be low and be controlled," affirms Juan Carlos Lavanderos, technical manager of SurAgra Chile.

From this experience, SurAgra has developed a product meeting the specific needs of blueberries: Quality Berries. "Conventional cooling is not enough; the fruits soften and this leads to decay. Taking into account the special needs of blueberries, we created some small pads that are included in the box together with micro-perforated plastic bags, which improve the shelf life and condition on arrival of blueberries," states Mr Lavanderos. After two years since the product was launched, it has taken over 20% of the Chilean market. 70% of Chilean blueberry exports are intended for the United States, which has not yet approved the use of this component to be used in contact with food.

"The market potential is extraordinary, but it is still a new technology in the process of adaptation. If we take into account that Chile exports 30 million boxes of blueberries per year, of which 20 go to the United States, the FDA's approval is critical to gain market share," concludes the representative.

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