

OVERVIEW GLOBAL MARKET SOFT FRUIT

In northern Europe, the soft fruit season is coming to an end. The last batches of domestic fruit are reaching good prices. Now it is time to wait for the imports from southern Europe to build up. Besides, especially in the case of blueberries, there are also imports from Latin America. In that region, Argentinian growers are facing problems, but Chileans and Peruvians are much more optimistic. Mexico also has good prospects. Further north, in the US, a strawberry alarm has been raised. The supply is small and there is a gap between the seasons.

Strawberry alarm in the US

The autumn strawberry season is coming to an end. The harvest in northern California has been completed. The market is now waiting for the harvest in Santa Maria and Oxnard to kick off. The winter harvest in Oxnard starts in November and the volume grows in December. The supply from Mexico is limited and Florida won't hit the market for another three or four weeks. As a result, there is a shortage of this summer fruit at the moment. The demand for strawberries is still much higher than the supply. The California production is limited because of the switch to winter strawberries. Consequently, there is a gap in the transition between the different regions. The strawberries that are available suffer a number of quality issues, including softness, over ripeness or the appearance of white heads and deformities. Thus, the shelf life is not as long as traders are used to.

Blueberries and blackberries

The market situation is better for blueberries. The high prices of the past year are gradually falling. The supply from Argentina is well underway, driving prices down. Moreover, there is some supply from Peru and just before the New Year imports will start arriving from Chile. Still, it has generally been a difficult season, according to a trader. The biggest reason for this has been the lower supply from Argentina and Chile. Also, growers in California are struggling with low prices. "This was one of the worst years in history," affirms a trader.

The blackberry market is looking a lot better. The supply from Mexico is stable. At present, the supply is high and prices stand at an average level.

Argentinian supply has been lower

The supply of Argentinian blueberries has been lower this year. An American importer points out that this has been result of bad weather in the Latin American country, which took a toll on the harvest volume. Also, according to the importer, growers have been testing new varieties, which often fail to reach the figures of fully developed commercial varieties.

The prices are low, which is forcing exporters to ship their berries by sea in order to cut costs. The exporters have warehouses filled with blueberries and this situation is not likely to change until the end of the season.

Chile: good year blueberries, raspberries on return

In recent times, Chilean blueberry growers have had to face trade embargoes and export restrictions; therefore, the blueberries have become less attractive to growers, as reported by a US importer. The acreage is therefore under pressure. Chilean traders are optimistic about the season. The demand will be great because Argentina and Peru are finishing their campaigns earlier. Prospects point to the production volume growing by 20%, which should be good, considering that demand from China has also increased.

The prospects for raspberries are not as optimistic. The production is falling every year, the demand is small and growers are choosing to cultivate more profitable crops. The export consists entirely of frozen raspberries.

Strawberry cultivation is quite good. The forecasts predicted a decline in volume, but as yet this has not been the case. The price is high because of the limited availability in the US. Exporters also see opportunities in this market.

Peru invests in raspberries

The blueberry season was good this year. Thanks to favourable taxing, growers were able to keep prices stable and still make a profit. In recent weeks, Chile has also been present in the market, leading to a reduction of the demand. Most growers choose the Biloxi variety.

The cultivation of raspberries is under development and is expected to continue growing in the coming years. The acreage is steadily expanding. The main export destinations are the Netherlands and Spain.

Colombia records growth of strawberry cultivation

In recent years, the cultivation of strawberries has increased rapidly. Domestic demand is on the rise. The supply is so great, that the prices are lower than in previous years.

Mexico invests in exports

Several Mexican exporters are targeting Dubai. An exporter explains that the first shipment of soft fruit to the Emirate was made in early October. The majority (70%) consists of raspberries and the rest is mostly blackberries. The soft fruit is exported by air via Europe; therefore, the transit time is 3 days. Soft fruit is an important export product for the country. The category has actually become the third most important in the ranking of agricultural export products.

Blackberries and blueberries

The blackberry season started in September. The market for the fruit is stable, but efforts are going in the attempt to boost its popularity worldwide. Exports are focused on the US, Europe and China. El Niño pulled a switch on the season, but investments have been made in more robust systems to protect the fruit against strong winds. As for blueberries, it is difficult to compete with the South American countries that are in production, but Mexico has a number of export destinations that those countries have no access to.

Greece sets sights on UAE

A Greek exporter focusing on the United Arab Emirates market explained that they work with two varieties: Fortuna and Camerosa. The former is suitable for the Arab market and has a good appearance. This variety is available from the end of November and the season lasts until March/April. The latter is intended for the European market and is tastier. The Camerosa campaign starts in December.

Spanish strawberry acreage stable

The total acreage devoted to strawberries this year is in line with that of the previous year (5,800 hectares), with the possibility of a reduction in the planting of no more than 4 or 5%. The blueberry acreage is growing, although the actual impact of this cannot yet be estimated, given that these plants take 3 years to become commercially productive after the planting. An increase is also expected in the planting of raspberries and blackberries. At the moment, growers in Huelva are able to supply the market with four kinds of berries: strawberries, blueberries, raspberries and blackberries.

If the weather conditions are good, the first strawberries will be harvested around Christmas. Last year, the high temperatures during the autumn resulted in the first strawberries already hitting the market in early December.

Belgium switches to import

Strawberry prices have been high for a while. The fruit costs between 5 and 6 Euro for 500 grams. This has to do with the fact that the supply is much lower than normal for this period. There is currently a low production in the Netherlands and Belgium, and Egypt and Spain are not yet on the market. According to a Belgian auction, these smaller volumes are the result of the earlier start of the harvest because of the warm weather and to the lower yield of the plants that are currently in production.

Strawberries

The domestic production is falling and the wholesaler will soon offer Spanish strawberries again. "We usually start with the Spanish fruit in mid or late November. We also still have some Belgian winter crops, namely Sonata and Elsanta, but they play a smaller role and are usually expensive," explains a trader.

It has been a unique year for strawberries; a strange season. Prices and volumes have gone up and down. This time, the weather seemed to play an even greater role in shaping the market situation than in previous years, says a trader.

Blueberries

A grower explains that this has been the first year when all blueberries have been sold on the domestic market. In recent years, some of the production was shipped to other countries. "Local" is not always the key point for the buyers. "If they can get it cheaper, some will buy it somewhere else; from Poland and Spain for the early berries, for example. We are very happy that a remarkable growth has been recorded with blueberries in those countries," affirms the producer. The price for the blueberries is currently based mainly on imports from Peru and Argentina. There is plenty of volume available, but there are big differences in terms of quality. The price oscillates between 1.20 and 2 Euro per 125 grams.

Blackberries and raspberries

Last week, there was some oversupply of blackberries. This week, prices have gone back up to 2.20 Euro for 125 grams. The raspberry season is nearing its end in the Netherlands and Belgium. The market will switch to imports from Spain and Portugal. A trader says that the quality of Spanish raspberries is not stable; the Portuguese fruit has a better, more stable supply and a longer shelf life.

The Netherlands: Great prices for greenhouse strawberries; Egyptian supply arriving to empty market

The production of greenhouse strawberries of the Elsanta variety arrived earlier than in previous years due to the exceptionally warm weather in September. For most growers, the

harvest kicked off more than two weeks earlier than usual, peaking at week 39 and with production volumes falling also after that. The sharply higher prices per kilo resulted in satisfactory profits this autumn. However, there are differences between the growers who planted early or late. Since last week, we see auctions in the Netherlands and Belgium reaching prices of about € 9.00 to € 12.00 per kilo for the fruit with the best characteristics, but other sorts are also reaching fairly good prices.

Egyptian growers have reported to be able to supply their fruit as early as late this week. The growing conditions have been good this year and the first strawberries of the season are looking great. The logistic routes have been streamlined in recent years, and there is consequently a visible improvement in the fruit's quality and shelf life. This year, these strawberries are arriving to an almost empty market and the expectations are high.

Italy invests in cultivation

Soft fruit has a lot of potential. A few years ago, a cooperative made an investment to cultivate the fruit in the south of Italy. As a result, the domestic season could be extended, making the country less dependent on imports. Such projects can be found in Calabria and Sicily. The focus is on raspberries (Vajolet) and blackberries (Loch Ness). The season of Sicilian blackberries lasts from March to May/June, which means there is some small overlap with Calabria.

Raspberries

Two companies have started growing raspberries on 14 hectares of greenhouses. These raspberries are on the market from November to August. The greenhouse cultivation of Adelita raspberries has a lot of potential, especially in the south. Successful tests have been carried out in Basilicata, Campania, Calabria and Sicily. These raspberries are marketed as a club variety. The first open field production arrives in May/June, while crops grown on substrate follow suit in July/August.

This year, there will also be tests with the greenhouse cultivation of San Rafael in Terracina, Scanzano Jonico Policoro. This variety is characterised by a large fruit and a long shelf life. Moreover, in central and southern Italy, the harvest, depending on the crop rotation, takes place in two periods when there is little supply: January to March and March to May.

Goji berries

After several years of tests in Calabria, growers have managed to successfully set up the cultivation of goji berries. The berry is grown by different companies in different regions. There is great demand for fresh berries, and last season, retailers carried out tests with them that yielded successful results. A grower affirms that some promotional efforts are still needed to convince consumers in Europe that the berries are not only available in dried form.

Blueberries

According to a grower, the sector must invest more resources on the cultivation of berries, because Italy is an advantageous position. The country's production is alone on the market between June and July. In the other months, the fruit is imported from overseas or from Europe. It would be great to take better advantage of this period. The consumption of berries is on the rise and this creates opportunities.

Strawberries

The Marisol variety does well in Italy and abroad, managing to meet all expectations. The quality of the strawberries that are now on the market is good and the prices are attractive. The autumn is an interesting period for the Verona. The demand for strawberries is stable year round. One of the autumn varieties is the Eva, which hits the market together with newer varieties, such as the Garda. The autumn harvest begins 35 to 40 days after the planting (20-25 August) and lasts for 20 to 25 days. The same plants are also harvested in the spring, between April and May. The yield in the autumn is lower, but the prices are attractive.

High prices in France

The seasons in the French region of Rhône Alpes and Val de Loire are nearing their end. Prices for strawberries of the Charlotte variety range between 5.80 and 6 Euro per 500 grams. Raspberries yield almost double that amount with just half of the volume. The price for 125 grams stands at 12 Euro, and loose raspberries from Roussillon cost 6 Euro.

Danes pay for Danish strawberries

The retail put so much pressure on prices that many growers could not survive; therefore, the soft fruit market is into the hands of a few large companies, as explained by a trader. The remaining growers are in a good position; given that there is little supply, they can keep the prices high. The Danish consumer wants Danish fruit and is prepared to dip into their pockets. This is especially true for strawberries. The peak of the season lasts for just three weeks.

The bulk of the crop is grown in the open ground; there are also some small greenhouse crops, whose season lasts until about October. For open ground crops, the season peaks from June to August.

At present there is a gap in the supply of strawberries. Imports are currently made from the Netherlands until the start of the season in Spain and Italy. The Italian season starts in week 48, and the Spanish season will kick off a few weeks later. Ahead of the New Year, the demand for strawberries grows, reaching its peak two weeks before the New Year. The prices are even higher than in the summer months. At week 48, the prices for Sicilian strawberries stand at about 20 Euro for 2.5 kg.

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