

Spain : Aragonese fruit wants a share of Chinese market

Last April, a dozen companies signed the export protocol and for the next campaign they are working to address the logistical challenges detected and establish the necessary business contacts, as explained by Gloria Izquierdo, from Summer Fruit, one of the most important companies of Bajo Cinca. With an annual production totalling 15 million kilos, they export 99% to destinations like Europe, South Africa, Canada, the United Arab Emirates or Singapore.

Now, their new challenge is to reach the Asian giant, which they hope to achieve during the next campaign. To do this, they plan to make their shipments both by sea and air. Another great opportunity is the 'silk train', which connects Yiwu with Madrid and hopes to have a stop in Zaragoza. In the near future, Aragon's Foreign Trade delegate in China, Rafael Llopis, believes that the route will be "more effective, especially for some products, since it will shorten the deadlines and open the market in new areas in the inland." For now, however, it needs further development.

When shipping by sea, the biggest problem is the long journey, which can last for around 40 days. Therefore, what would be ideal is "to plan the shipments from the field, which requires adherence to strict protocols regarding the timing and manner of harvesting, the selection or the product's preservation," points out Izquierdo. If this method is used, it is possible to ship large containers, which can reach supermarkets, fruit stores or traditional markets.

In the case of air shipments, the conditions and destinations change. In fact, "the idea is to deliver high quality fruit, since the added value of the product must compensate for the high logistical costs involved," affirms Llopis, who, at the same time, underlines the great potential of this option, given that a high percentage of the population has its priorities clear: "quality and food safety." In this case, the battle against the local product is won, as the latter has a lower quality and also creates "greater mistrust."

The right partner

Aside from the logistics, another major challenge for producers is finding the right partner, i.e. the agent, importer, end customer or on-line platform ideal for product introduction. For this, Aragonese companies can seek the advice of the Government of Aragon and also use their experience in other markets, like the United Arab Emirates. In the case of Spain, the protocol signed affects citrus fruits, plums and peaches, which includes Paraguayo peaches and nectarines.

For now, sporadic shipments have been made with very unequal results. To carry them out successfully, several Aragonese companies are taking steps on various fronts. For example, Summer Fruit will continue to seek the necessary contacts at the Hong Kong fruit exporters and distributors fair. Although the expectations are high, the company is aware that it will be a long process and strive for "a gradual entry, which could take between three and four years," states Izquierdo.

Growing middle class

At present, Spain is the only country in the European Union authorised to export citrus fruits, plums and peaches to the Chinese market, which entails a great business opportunity due to the size of the Asian giant. Moreover, the population's consumption habits are changing as its purchasing power increases. The middle class is growing and introducing more proteins and fruits into their diet, as explained by Rafael Llopis, who participated in a workshop organised in Fraga on 14 December which was attended by about 25 entrepreneurs, all linked to the fruit sector and eager to learn about the possibilities of this new market, in which "the key factor is to establish the right contacts and overcome the logistics difficulties, since it offers great opportunities," added Llopis.

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