

Chile has sent more than 300,000 boxes of nectarines to China

According to data from ASOEX, in the current export 2016-2017 season (which goes from September 1, 2016 to March 23, 2017), Chile has exported more than 7.14 million boxes of nectarines to different target markets, i.e. 4.1% more than in the same period of the last season.

20.9% of this volume was shipped to Asia. 303 thousand tons were shipped to the Chinese market (excluding Hong Kong), a figure that coincides with the estimates made by ASOEX and is a promising start of the domestic shipments to that market, after its final opening in February this year.

Regarding the importance of the Chinese market for Chilean nectarines, Ronald Bown, President of ASOEX, said: "Chile exports about 7 million boxes of nectarines to the world. Starting next season, we estimate that nearly 50% of this volume will be exported to China. 80% of the white-fleshed varieties and 30% of the yellow pulp varieties will be sent to that country. The country expects to ship a total of 3.5 million boxes to that destination."

He said that another positive aspect of the Chinese market was that the recent opening would allow them to better distribute this fruit in different markets, generating a better income and higher returns than the current US \$65 million they achieve per season.

Chinese reception and projections

To know how well these early nectarine shipments to China were received, SimFRUIT spoke with Ignacio Huerta, the Sales Manager for Asia and USA of Geofrut, the largest exporter of this fruit to China this season; and Gonzalo Matamala, the General Manager for China of Gesex, the second biggest exporter to that market in this campaign.

"Our nectarines have had a very good reception. Demand has been strong and we hope it will continue like this for the nectarines that are arriving in China right now," stated the representative of Geofrut.

In the same vein, Matamala said: "We are very optimistic about the opening of the Chinese market to this product. It is a very interesting product for China, as it is well known by local consumers, and as China has a very good local supply. From this perspective, we have worked carefully to better understand how to approach this market with different varieties and packaging for the various existing distribution channels in China "

Regarding the estimates of shipments for next season, the industry expects to significantly increase volumes over this season. Ignacio Huerta, of Geofrut, agrees: "This season we shipped nearly 50,000 boxes and we hope to triple this volume next season."

The Sales Manager of Geofrut also highlighted the kind of pulp they were shipping to China: "We think we will increase shipments of white-fleshed nectarines to this China next season. Historically, yellow pulp nectarine exports to China have been small, but we think we'll send more next season. China is an interesting destination for yellow pulp, too, especially to decompress the natural market for this fruit, which is the United States. However, we have to consider sending varieties with good sugar levels and low acidity."

Launch

Gesex has had a trading company in Shanghai since 2014. In this context, it was commissioned to support the official launch of Chilean nectarine exports in China, an activity that was conducted by ProChile, Beijing.

"This activity sought to mark the start of the entry of nectarines and reinforce the avocados in the Chinese market," said Matamala.

The initiative was attended by media, importers, and retailers, among other people. The activity ended with a cooking show that incorporated nectarines in different local and international preparations, which allowed the organizers to show and teach the assistants the perfect maturity level to consume this fruit as well as its culinary versatility.

Chinese New Year

Regarding next season's shipments, both professionals agreed that the celebrations of the 2018 Chinese New Year offered a very good opportunity for Chilean nectarines, but that it would also test this offer against the competition from other sources, as well as against shipments of other Chilean products.

"We see excellent opportunities during the Chinese New Year. As everyone knows, the cherry is the star in this period. However, since the next New Year will take place very late, there will be fewer cherries, which we hope will benefit the nectarine. In any case, we must review how to manage the export times so that we can enter as many nectarines as we can prior to the Chinese New Year, when there is the highest demand for this product," said the representative of Geofrut.

"Undoubtedly, the industry and our company will pay more attention to this market next season, which will generate a higher volume of exports to mainland China, removing some pressure in other markets. It will be very interesting to see how this product overlaps with others, such as cherries, plums, and grapes," said the manager of Gesex.

Challenges

As for the challenges facing Chilean nectarine exports to China, Ronald Bown said the biggest challenge was that the fruit had a good post harvest. "The main challenges for producers and exporters are agricultural practices, and management in central packaging and cold chain, so that the nectarines arrive in good condition and without physiological disorders, such as browning, to the target markets," he said.

In this regard, Bown highlighted the work done by the Technology Consortium of fruit, consisting of ASOEX, producers and exporters, and the Pontificia Universidad Catolica de Chile, as a technology partner, which is developing 5 breeding programs. One of this programs (the Stone Fruit Breeding Program) includes the development of new varieties of nectarines that have a high quality, are tolerant to cold damage, and can be transported to far away destinations, such as China.

Ignacio Huerta agreed with this, and highlighted the importance of fruit's flavor: "The first thing we have to do is take good care of the crops and the shipping times so that the product arrives well. And, most importantly, we must ship the varieties that the Chinese consumers like the most, always taking into account that the most important thing for them is a high brix level," he said.

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