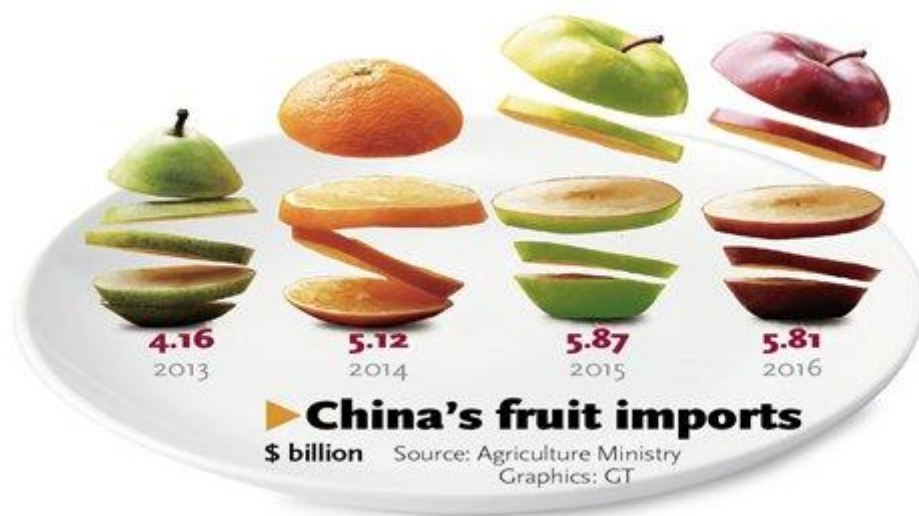


China sees fruit imports increase



China's fruit imports

China's fruit imports have been growing rapidly in the past few years, thanks partly to the nation's growing middle class population and the emergence of a new generation of consumers willing to spend more on healthy food, and the trend has huge economic implications for China's fruit-exporting neighbors, experts said.

The comments came after the Myanmar Times reported on May 25 that China is buying up almost all of Myanmar's exported mangoes this year. And some Western media reports in early May said Chinese consumers' new-found interest in avocados might cause a worldwide supply shortage.

"China has bought all of our mangoes meant for export this year. And the fruit is also fetching good prices," U Nay Lin Maung Maung, chair of the Myanmar Fruit, Flower and Vegetable Producers and Exporters Association in the Mandalay Region, was quoted by the Myanmar Times as saying.

Chinese traders are paying between 80 yuan (\$11.7) and 140 yuan for a 15 or 16 kilogram basket of Myanmar's Sein Talone mangoes this year, according to the report.

Zhu Danpeng, a food industry analyst, said that while the growth has been high in recent years, the potential of this sector has yet to be fully realized, given China's huge potential demand.

In 2014, China imported \$5.12 billion worth of fruit, up 23.1 percent year-on-year. This was followed by a 14.7 percent annual increase in 2015, according to a post on the website of the Ministry of Agriculture in February.

In 2016, the nation's fruit import volume dropped slightly, falling 1 percent year-on-year to \$5.81 billion.

Guo Xin, general manager of Nanning Xinjinhang Logistics Co and an expert in the transportation of fresh fruit, operates 134 heavy trucks shuttling between China and Vietnam.

Guo estimated that the market for fruit from Thailand alone could hit \$100 million in annual turnover, adding that Chinese customers' favorite kinds of fruit from Vietnam are pitaya and passion fruit.

"Among the fresh fruit imported from Southeast Asia, durians, longans and mangosteens are the top sellers," Guo told the Global Times Monday.

Guo said some kinds of fruit are seasonal, such as watermelon, mango, and rose apple, and this makes it difficult to estimate their import volume.

Since 2010, Laos banana exports jumped tenfold to become the country's largest export earner. Nearly all of the fruit is sent to China, according to a Reuters report in mid- May.

Changing trend

Experts said that the continued rise in consumption of imported fruit also reflects changes in China's consumption pattern.

"What is happening is that a lot of focus is going toward health. A lot of that is happening in the food sector," Vishal Bali, managing director of Nielsen China, told the Global Times on Monday.

"Increasingly we see an uptake in imported products [and produce], due to the rise of e-commerce, and [the fact that] delivery is not a challenge for lower-tier cities anymore," Bali said.

Policy factor

Zhu noted that China's fruit import business can be severely affected by the political ties between the fruit exporting nations and China. "Policies encouraging or restraining imports from a certain country have become a barometer of bilateral ties," Zhu said.

In 2016, the biggest beneficiary from China's policy was Thailand's durian fruit, Zhu said.

"Along with the surging number of Chinese tourists to Thailand and China's policy favoring member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the Thai durian has taken as much as 98 percent

of the Chinese market," Zhu noted. "Such market dominance brings sizable income to Thai farmers and related industries. This is also a footnote of friendly Sino-Thai ties."

Zhu said this aspect should be fully considered by industry players trying to make money out of the fruit import industrial chain, ranging from cold chain logistics, cross-border e-commerce and supermarket chains to commercial property development.

Lien article : <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1050131.shtml>