

Chile forecasts huge rise in cherry exports for 2017-18

The world's biggest cherry exporter is estimating volumes will increase by more than half year-on-year for the approaching season, barring any adverse weather events in the spring.

Chilean Cherry Committee president Cristián Tagle projected exports of around 160,000 metric tons (MT), which would represent a 67% boost over last season's 94,869MT.

The 2017-18 projection figure, which was presented at a seminar for cherry growers held in Curicó on Tuesday, is equivalent to 8,700 containers or 32 million boxes.

"This year everything is shaping up for a good harvest volume, although spring is still yet to come," Tagle told Fresh Fruit Portal.

"The weather events during the season will determine the quantity and quality of the cherries. However, at present, everything is shaping up for a good season for both of those aspects."

Around 86% of exports are sent to the Asian market, with China the leading market by far.

The head of the Chilean Fruit Growers Federation (Fedefruta) recently called on cherry producers to diversify their varieties and aim for fruit with larger sizing, after it was revealed average returns per kilo fell 8% year-on-year in 2016-17.

Last year the industry had originally forecast exports of 120,000MT, but weather factors in October and November affected production. The final export figure, however, was still a 13% increase over the 2015-16 season.

Peak export volumes typically come during December and January.

Bing is the leading variety in the country, but growers are increasingly planting Santana, Lapins and Regina, according to Oscar Aliaga, an agronomic engineer with the Catholic University of Valparaíso.

He added more state support was needed in order to increase research into cherries and ultimately boost the industry.

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