



By John Hey

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# Timely boost for Mexican berries

A new direct flight from Guadalajara to Hong Kong from Cathay Pacific has lifted shippers as they gear up for the opening of the China market



**C**athay Pacific's recent launch of a direct cargo flight from Guadalajara to Hong Kong has delivered a timely boost to Mexico's burgeoning berry exports, and new impetus for a range of the country's other fresh produce export lines.

Launched last October, the twice-weekly freighter service departs Guadalajara for Hong Kong each Thursday at 03:55 and Sunday at 05:20. As well as opening up an important direct route into Asia for Mexico's fresh produce exporters, it marks a key step in developing bilateral trade.

"A freighter service between Hong Kong and Mexico is an important step in bringing two such vibrant economies closer," Mandy Ng, manager of cargo sales and marketing at Cathay Pacific told Asiafruit. "We believe there's growing demand for direct cargo services between Asia and Mexico."

Berries are one of the main fresh produce lines to benefit from the new direct service into Hong Kong, Ng said Cathay's

modern 787-8F aircraft provide an air-conditioned, temperature-controlled environment for shipping such highly perishable fresh produce.

"Our Fresh LIFT product offers a cold chain service that ensures expedient handling for all perishables," she noted. "The new Cathay Pacific Cargo Terminal in Hong Kong, with its state-of-the-art cold chain facility, is able to accommodate the large volume of produce that comes from Guadalajara. The cold room has a work station that can handle unit load device (ULD) build up and unload product in a controlled environment."

Mario Steta, secretary of Aneberries, the association of Mexican berry exporters, said that nine of its 16 members have been using the new service, with their airfreight volumes increasing substantially in the months since it launched. Blackberries and raspberries have dominated sendings to date, he added.

"We now have a direct service into Hong

Kong, which means we don't have to go via US airports such as LAX or SFO," said Steta. "This gives us more of a competitive edge and reduces our costs somewhat. The main benefits are post-harvest management and cold chain integrity, faster delivery time to market and the reliability of cargo space.

Steta added that the Mexican berry industry has not been able to take full advantage of the service, however, because of severe rainfall in October/November and at the end of last year, which cut into planned volumes.

### China access on the horizon

The big opportunity the Mexican berry industry is gearing up for in Asia is the opening of the China market, and Steta told Asiafruit Cathay's new service comes at "just the right time" in that respect. "We're negotiating formal access to China, and the service provides the logistical support needed to meet market demands and commitments," he said.

The Mexican berry industry has been

**Broader benefits**

Ng said Cathay's two weekly freight

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working to open up the China market since Autumn 2012, and Steta said access appears to be drawing close. "We expect to have a visit by three AQSIQ representatives by the end of February to verify field and packing operations," he says. "We're hoping to have protocols finalised and approved by the Chinese and Mexican authorities by October, when Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto will be visiting China. The support from Mexican agricultural offices and the Mexican Embassy in Beijing has been very strong."

Besides berries, Cathay's new service is benefiting a range of other product lines, many of which are grown in the Jalisco region around Guadalajara. "We see opportunities for asparagus, mangoes and limes, but also other crops such as green onions, green beans, new tomato varieties, bell peppers and garlic," said Ng. "The service helps to make Mexico a perfect source to fulfill the windows of supply the market needs. Today global retailers depend on having products on their shelves year-round."

services are only "a starting point", with the airline looking to expand its Mexican services in the future. And Steta noted that other airlines are also responding to the opportunities in Mexico's cargo market. "We now have flights from Korean Air into Seoul," he said. "Even though we're not shipping berries into South Korea, it opens another route to access Asia, and it adds to Lufthansa flights that started last summer to Germany."