



By Mike Knowles

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Driscoll's predicts blackberry boom

Company developing new sources in Netherlands, Belgium, Portugal, Spain and potentially Morocco to replace Mexico



Photo: Dwight Sipler, Creative Commons

The European market for blackberries could be poised to take off, provided adequate volumes of sweeter-tasting varieties can be procured to meet growing consumer demand.

That's the view of Theo Houwen, managing director in Europe, Middle East and Africa for leading soft fruit marketer Driscoll's, who feels the supply side of the commercial equation will eventually catch up with the market.

"For blackberries, we're focusing on getting our consistent sweet-tasting varieties into the market, which we think will enable us to revive the category," he told eurofruit. "The difficult thing is getting the supply; the demand is certainly there but production is running a bit behind at the moment."

Driscoll's is currently building up blackberry supply in a number of places, including the Netherlands, where it has both glasshouse and open-field production, and Belgium.

Further south, it has significant areas of production in Portugal, as well as a small amount of production in Spain.

Morocco, could soon follow, Houwen revealed, explaining that efforts to boost the European blackberry segment would ultimately depend on supply being closer to hand.

"Ultimately this is to replace Mexico as a source, but it's still very much at the trial stage and Mexico continues to provide us with the biggest volume," he explained.

The potential to grow consumption is apparently huge. Household penetration for blackberries in Europe is currently estimated to be only about 4 per cent, well behind strawberries and even raspberries.

"People tend to buy blackberries for the same reasons they buy raspberries, which are doing well at around 14-16 per cent penetration and actually haven't reached their full potential either," Houwen noted.

"Done right, we could be looking at multiplying the volume of blackberries sold in Europe at least four-fold."

Houwen will be speaking about changes in the international berry business at the upcoming Global Berry Congress in Amsterdam on 7-9 April. To book your place, visit www.berrycongress.com

<http://www.fruitnet.com/americafruit/article/1474/parts-of-san-diego-quarantined-as-psyllid-count-mounts>

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