By Maura Maxwell

Wednesday 15th June 2016, 14:54 GMT

Colombian fruit exports rise sharply

A new report by Maersk shows containerised fruit exports from the South American country are booming.

Fruit exports are fuelling the growth of containerised shipments from Colombia according to a new report from Maersk Line.

Foreign trade in containers increased by 4 per cent in the first quarter of 2016 compared to the same period last year. Maersk said it expected this gradual growth to continue throughout the first semester of 2016.

Fruit was the main product exported in containers from Colombia during the first three months of 2016. Fruit sales, excluding banana, grew 29 per cent, partly due to the replacement of traditional sugar cane plantations by a variety of fruit crops, such as pineapples and strawberries. Upon including banana exports in the statistics, exports growth soared by 87 per cent relative to the same period last year.

The report said the rise is explained by a modal shift in exports at the port of Turbo, Antioquia where bananas that were traditionally exported in banana vessels are increasingly being shipped in refrigerated containers, which Maersk claims offer more attractive conditions for Colombian producers, as they allow them to ensure the quality of their product, reach new markets, and strengthen their presence in key markets such as Europe, where Colombian export growth was about 80 per cent during the first quarter of 2016.

‘Containerships are more efficient due to economies of scale and the reductions they offer in terms of transportation costs make Colombian goods more competitive’, said Juan Camilo Vásquez, Colombia sales manager for Maersk Line.

In parallel, the growth in fruit exports has been reinforced by promotional initiatives led by ProColombia, the state trade promotion agency. ‘A clear example lies in the sale of gooseberries, where a new agreement with the US reached last year to lift restrictions on that fruit has reduced export costs by roughly 40 per cent, allowing this new export to become more competitive in the American market,’ the report continued.

Hass avocados remain one of the most sought-after products in the European market. During the first quarter of this year, Colombia’s avocado exports in containers grew 148 per cent in comparison to the same quarter in 2015. This was largely driven by access to new markets, such as Spain and Belgium.