



By Maura Maxwell

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Westfalia takes the long view

Claus Lippert, CEO of WFI's holding company HMH, discusses the company's expanding production footprint



WFI's link-up with Agricom is the latest move to shore up its Latin American supply base and provides a firmer foothold in the region. How important is Latin America to you - both as a supply source and a market in its own right?

Claus Lippert: Latin America is the centre of gravity in the avocado world. Therefore the investment in Agricom, as well as those in Mexico's Aztecavo and Peru's Incavo strengthens Westfalia's position tremendously. The Latin American markets are also very interesting as consumption there is already high and growing rapidly. These markets are often neglected as other companies focus purely on exports to the European Union and US, but Westfalia intends to position itself as a long-term leader in the region with our premium ripened product.

How important is the Agricom deal in terms of helping Westfalia to develop its non-avocado programmes?

CL:

It provides a way of complementary diversification with high-value products, where synergies in marketing and distribution can be extracted.

You recently completed the first phase of plantings at your new production facility in Portugal, Westfalia Fruit Iberia (WFI). Can you tell me more about the project?

CL: We have completed the first 80ha of plantings and intend to continue establishing similar areas annually. The first commercial crop will probably be ready in 2020.

I understand that Portugal will also play a crucial part in building volumes of your new Gem avocado. Outside South Africa, are you growing the variety in any other country?

CL: Absolutely. Gem is finding real traction and over time this 'gourmet' avocado has the potential to become a very significant offering in the market. It is currently farmed by an elite group of licensed growers throughout the world.

The eating quality of Gem is just wonderful, the fruit's flesh separates from the skin easier than with other avocados, and the skin is thicker which often reduces bruising. These are just some of its many benefits.

Until now, WFI's core focus has been on the European market. What progress is the company made in newer markets like Asia and the Middle East?

CL: WFI has been present in the Middle East and Asia for decades. However, with the strong position now in Chile, Peru, Colombia, Mexico and California, the potential in these markets can really be unlocked. The Middle East and India are also growing their avocado consumption and present very interesting prospects.

It has taken just a few years for the avocado to rise from total obscurity to one of the most in-demand produce imports in China. Do you think there is the same scope to develop other markets such as India in a similar way?

CL:

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

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Absolutely. The avocado is such a versatile and popular fruit and it fits in perfectly with a healthy lifestyle and vegetable-rich diet. Did you know, for example, that avocados are also ideal nourishment for diabetics?

Does WFI have the breadth of supply to be able to ensure that it meets the needs of its retail customers throughout the year?

CL: WFI has the widest spread of own production across the world. As a grower-supplier, with the addition of complementary sourcing from other growers, retail customers can be assured of supply from different sources at any

given time. This reduces the risk of disruption due to natural disasters, port or shipping delays and so on. It means we can also always provide the freshest fruit in the right windows.

Finally, as one of the world's best-known avocado brands, how do you plan to future-proof the business in order to ensure that Westfalia remains at the forefront of the industry in the coming decades?

CL: We invest steadily in research and have long stood at the forefront of innovation. Westfalia has the biggest research capacity in the whole avocado world. Exciting

new developments are being established for the future. Westfalia also has a proud history of being socially and environmentally responsible, which together with its commercial success, positions the group very well for the long run. Our true customer focus has stood the test of time and we have long-standing relationships with preferred retailers where we have added value to their business in different ways. This will continue.