



By Matthew Jones

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Covid propels Asia's digital growth

Opening session of Asiafruit Congress ON homes in on digitisation of region's fruit business



(l-r): Fruitnet Media International managing director Chris White talks to Dimuto chief executive Gary Loh at Asiafruit Congress ON

The coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic has accelerated the growth of Asia's digital roots at both ends of the supply chain.

That was the key take-home message from the opening session of Asiafruit Congress ON, Asia's leading conference event for fresh produce decision-makers, which has also gone digital in 2020.

Viewers from around the globe tuned into the opening session 'Going digital: new tracks for Asia's fresh produce supply chain' earlier today (17 November).

Kantar's retail, sales and shopper practice lead for South-East Asia, Annabel Robertson, set the scene for the session with her expert insight on the digitalisation of fresh food retail across Asia, and the evolution of digital routes to market during the pandemic.

According to Robertson, Covid-19 has added fuel to a retail segment already exploding in Asia, with an estimated 185m households in the region buying groceries via e-commerce platforms for the first time this year.

Robertson said Asian consumers are showing a degree of caution when it comes to returning to physical stores post-pandemic, indicating the migration towards digital retail is a permanent one.

"It's expected that people in South-East Asia are 1.5 times less likely to go out in the future, as compared to their American counterparts," Robertson explained.

"There's been a massive change in consumer behaviour that will influence how and where people shop in the future."

Robertson pointed out that younger

generations aren't the sole driving force behind the growth in Asia's online retail trade.

"We've seen older demographics explode in e-commerce," she noted. "By 2025, e-commerce in Asia will look drastically different and we'll have a much higher percentage of buyers over 50."

It's not all doom and gloom for physical retail according to Robertson, who pointed out that online retail still only makes up a small percentage of the overall grocery market in South-East Asia.

She also underlined the strength of omni-channel retail in Asia, with many of the region's leading e-commerce platforms investing in developing a physical retail presence.

One such company is JD Fresh, the fresh food arm of e-commerce giant JD.com. JD Fresh has been spearheading the

charge to digitise physical retail in China through its 7Fresh stores for a number of

director Chris White, Dimuto chief executive Gary Loh explained how his

her company has also been using digital platforms as communication tools during

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

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years now, and the company's purchasing manager, Una Wang, outlined its latest moves to incorporate hi-tech solutions into its business, both at consumer level and further up the chain in terms of transport and logistics.

Wang also detailed how JD Fresh has invested in developing a chain of community-based convenience stores under the Jingxuanhaoguo banner. Wang said JD Fresh's aim is to empower traditional 'mom-and-pop' stores through the use of digital technology, helping alleviate challenges around procurement, transportation and storage that these stores often face.

The session's focus then turned to digitisation of the supply chain upstream. In an interview with Fruitnet Media International managing

company is using blockchain technology to solve many of the issues in today's fresh produce supply chain.

The company's innovative solution assigns an independent digital identity to each piece of fruit in a consignment. The digital identity not only provides suppliers and their customers with traceability throughout the supply chain, it also caters to a growing interest in food provenance among end consumers. Dimuto's solution allows shoppers to view the product's key supply chain data by simply scanning a QR code on their mobile phones.

"We're trying to make the world more connected and close the loop between the farmer and the consumer," Loh said.

Earlier, Syngenta China's head of vegetable seeds, Zhou Qin, detailed how

Covid-19. Through live stream events and social media platforms such as TikTok, the company has successfully launched new varieties to thousands of farmers across China.

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Asia Fruit Logistica ON takes place online on 18-20 November.

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