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NZ cherry exports flying high

Helicopters being used to protect crop, as exports tipped to hit NZ\$50m this season



The downward draft generated by helicopter blades has been used as a protection mechanism for New Zealand's high valued cherry crops.

Responding to unprecedented levels of demand from key Asian markets in the lead-up to Chinese New Year, growers have instructed pilots to fly just meters above their trees in an attempt to fan off moisture caused by recent rainfall.

While it is an expensive exercise, Marie Dawkins, chief executive of Summerfruit NZ, told Reuters the nature of the cherry season required forward thinking.

"It's a high-value, fast-moving crop which means it gets a lot less room for glitches like rain," Dawkins explained.

The New Zealand industry certainly appears to be reaping reward for its efforts over the 2016/17 season.

According to Reuters, New Zealand exported 900 tonnes of cherries over a one-week period in early January, eclipsing the record volume for this time period. The high levels of demand coincide with the early fall of Chinese New Year in 2017 (28 January), with China and Taiwan expected to account for around 60 per cent of cherry exports this season.

"I had a woman recently calling me up from China wanting 500 tonnes. We only do probably 50 tonnes in our orchard maximum, so I think she was dreaming a little bit," Martin Milne, a cherry grower from Cromwell, told Reuters.

To help cater for the high levels of demand, chartered flights have been [booked to carry New Zealand cherries](#) directly to Asia.

The overall value of the export trade is expected to rise from NZ\$43m last season to NZ\$50m in 2016/17.