

By Paco Seva

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Don't turn your back on Asia, Spain told

Companies who take a long-term view of the Asian market will reap rich rewards, says Oliver Huesmann



Oliver Huesmann

Spanish producers should seize on new opportunities presented by the Covid-19 pandemic in emerging markets like Asia and Africa.

This is the view of Oliver Huesmann of Fruitconsulting, who says rising incomes and an expected strengthening in demand for fresh fruit and vegetables as consumers seek natural ways of protecting themselves from the virus herald a bright future for Spanish exports.

"Before the health crisis, consumption of fruit and vegetables in Asia averaged 420g a day and this will surely increase in the future," Huesmann said.

"Asian countries will not be able to cover this need, so they'll have to continue importing from Europe, South America, Australia and Africa."

He pointed out that the pandemic had brought about some important and permanent changes in consumer behaviour, such as an increase in online shopping, that suppliers would have to take account of from now on.

"E-commerce is a channel that we have to take into account when selling to our customers in Asia. The importance of B2C promotions and actions at point of sale are now a fundamental requirement," he said.

"It's not only important that the importer knows us, now, it is much more important that consumers know us."

Huesmann also had a stark message for the companies (notably in the citrus sector) who stopped supplying China in reaction to the higher prices being paid on the European market when supplies from third countries were interrupted by the virus, describing their behaviour as "ignorant" and "short-termist".

"They left their Asia customers high and dry, clearly thinking that the German retailers will continue to pay these high prices in the coming years," he said.

"They didn't even bother to blame the lack of containers – instead, they simply told them: 'I'll sell in Europe because it pays more'".

Huesmann said this behaviour risked

overturning all the efforts that Spain has made to break into the Asian market, and praised the efforts made by some companies to honour their programmes with Asian customers.

"If we repeat the behaviour of recent weeks, we risk not being able to enter these markets again. But if we manage to regain their trust in us and in our products we will emerge even stronger.

He urged companies to react swiftly in order to make the most opportunities presented by the post-Covid-19 reality.

"America has attacked the whole world in recent weeks and with this they have lost many commercial relations inside and outside Asia.

"The gap is there – and if we don't fill it other suppliers like Egypt, Turkey, Greece and Morocco will."

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