

For fresh fruit and vegetable marketing and distribution in Asia



By Fred
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UK exporter eyes strawberry expansion in Asia

GB Seasons wants to send more strawberries to Hong Kong and Japan next season after a successful first 18 months in business



Mike Soulsby has sent 100 pallets of strawberries to Asia this season

British fresh produce exporter GB Seasons is looking for new strawberry growers to work with after identifying strong potential for top-quality UK product in Asia.

The nascent export business has airfreighted 100 pallets of premium strawberries from Heathrow to Hong Kong and Japan this season, and said it is “proud” of the UK growers it has worked with for “building new export markets for British fresh produce”.

The Covid-19 pandemic has made the 2020 season challenging due to limited global airfreight capacity and high freight rates, and director and founder Mike Soulsby said he would otherwise have been able to export more produce at a lower price.

The biggest limitation has been his ability to visit growers. “If it wasn’t for Covid-19, I would have been able to visit more producers and build my supply base more,” he said. “But I’m working hard with my procurement partner Mudwalls Farms to find the best UK

the supply base for export sales into Asia.”

Founded by the experienced exporter in 2019, GB Seasons began exports to Asia last August. To date, it has focused on exporting strawberries, as well as smaller volumes of raspberries, leeks and kale.

The company supplies small retail chains in Hong Kong, as well as foodservice businesses in Japan. Further down the line, it wants to begin exports to the Middle East as well.

“Production of British strawberries has grown a lot over the last decade and the season has got longer and longer,” said Soulsby. “Until quite recently, I don’t think anyone had started looking at opportunities for export, but now the volume and the grower capability are there in this country.”

He added: “The UK is never going to be a huge exporter of fresh produce – these are fairly niche trading lines – but for what I’m doing there’s certainly enough business to get going with.”



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

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growers, across all products, in order to build Soulsby stressed that the main opportunities

for British airfreight to Asia are in premium product lines, particularly strawberries and raspberries, as well as specialist, high-value vegetables such as Tenderstem and red kale.

“You can’t afford to export commodity lines; you won’t be able to compete with the likes of the US, Australia and the Netherlands. Instead, you have to export more premium lines, something a bit different,” he said.

“Even in seafreight products like apples, it’s hard to compete with the French or the Italians because we don’t have the same scale.”

The Reading-based exporter has been exporting fresh produce to Asia for the past 10 years, but until now he had been dealing with produce from Peru, Italy, Spain and France.

Soulsby used to be country

manager for Peru at T&G Global where he was responsible for exporting fresh Peruvian asparagus, grapes, citrus and mango to global markets.

After this, he became the supplier’s senior export manager, in charge of exporting European produce by sea and air to markets in Asia and the Middle East.

Now fully focused on exporting UK-grown produce at GB Seasons, Soulsby believes that the appeal of British branding in Asia “can sometimes be overstated” and emphasised that, above all, the product and the eating quality “have to be right”.

“The soft power of labelling a product with a Union Jack is helpful to get it noticed, but if you’re going to build something long term, it’s not enough,” he said.