

For fresh fruit and vegetable marketing and distribution in Asia



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Bumpy ride may not be over

The pandemic may have permanently changed the way that all of us in the fresh produce industry do business



Recent months have been nothing short of a rollercoaster ride for many people in the fruit and vegetable industry. It started with a surreal Fruit Logistica. Delegates from the Asian market already had a feeling of what was to come, while the Europeans were still mostly in positive spirits about the year ahead.

The events that have occurred since then have given us as a bumpy ride, to say the least. You could say the year started slowly, followed by extremes in sales, before ending with yet more uncertainty.

So what have we learned? During the first lockdown period, we saw that citrus is still considered by consumers to be the number one fruit when it comes to fighting any kind of virus. Despite our efforts in promoting the health benefits of other types of fresh produce, consumers turned to citrus like never before. This resulted in extreme price levels and supply shortages across the global citrus market. Importers have done well, but this is a short-term gain.

Many other products have seen a negative Covid-19 impact when it comes to demand and also price levels. Restaurant closures and fewer meetings with friends and family seem to have affected sales of exotic produce, which has struggled over this period. Statistical enthusiasts will be going mad over the coming months to gain insights into changing consumer behaviour.

After the first wave of consumers prepping for doomsday subsided, the market actually slowed, and it became more evident that retailers were the ones that would benefit most from the crisis. Indeed, as consumer demand and prices normalised, the shutdown of restaurants and events left them increasingly dominant. Importers that depended on non-retail sales struggled – in a low-margin industry, losing a significant part of your revenue is not something from which you can quickly recover. As a result, the trade was hit

Trouble ahead

The new year will not bring a lot of joy, either. Brexit in particular threatens to

be another blow to those who depend on free European trade. With the pandemic keeping everyone in the industry busy, there are worries over how well everyone is prepared for the UK's detachment.

Remote working for much of the past year has resulted in inefficient practices and less new business, so crucial projects like preparing for Brexit have been far from optimal. This only adds to the uncertainty. We can only conclude that, in 2020, the beauty of trading was lost a little. Let's all hope we will find our way back in 2021.

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