



By Michael Barker

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Waste Warriors

Dutch fresh produce supplier Spica is focused on sustainability and reducing food waste with its soft fruit venture O'berries. Michael Barker caught up with team lead Omar Ehab to find out more



O'berries is launching a 100 per cent recyclable 500g paper bucket of blueberries in November



What's the main focus of O'berries and in which markets does it operate?

Omar Ehab: We focus on soft fruit and have a small but specialised assortment including blueberries, strawberries, blackberries, raspberries, cherries, and grapes. We are located in the Netherlands but sell in Germany, the UK, Benelux, Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, Malaysia and Sweden.

Our customer base in the EU, Asia and Middle East includes: small retailers of 1-2 shops, middle-sized chains of 3-10 shops, key accounts of 10+ shops, restaurant chains, hotel chains, airline catering companies and wholesalers.

How did the brand come about?

OE: O'berries is the culmination of the experience Spica has gained in berries over the years. We saw a growing demand for absolutely premium, flawless fruit and our vision is always to add value for our

What are you doing to reduce food waste?

OE: We are working with the SDG goals and focus largely on sustainability, including food waste reduction. Many fresh fruits come from famine-hit countries and, according to UN stats, over a third of the world's food is thrown out.

Premium product lines can come at a significant environmental and ethical cost because of the amount of waste generated, hence we will be using the not-so-premium or "funny-looking" fruit in other products. O'berries is more than just fresh berries – it is a full range of basically whatever has berries in it, so think sauces, berry mixes, jams, pre-mixed smoothie packs etc.

By the end of this year, starting around Christmas, we will also be having a weekly sale of berries that are perfectly suitable for consumption but just not so pretty. These will be sold in two shops here in Holland and online through our web shop at really low prices.

At a later stage, we will be cooperating with other countries and shops to preserve the "funny-looking" fruit and sell it at cost price, or even lower, to countries struggling with severe food shortages. The other side of Spica BV, a food ingredient called Incre.edible, is already en route to using funny berries with a by-product of rice to make a sachet for children suffering from severe malnutrition.

How do you view the UK and EU markets at present?

OE: The UK market is becoming more and more difficult to approach and we are very concerned about how Brexit will impact fresh sales. We are already reaching for new customers to replace the revenue coming in from the UK. The main concern is the lead time – it is already challenging to deliver good berries to the UK with 1+ days of delivery time, but with no open borders this will be a ride through hell for raspberries for instance.

I am also very concerned about how this

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customers, growers, and societies alike.

will impact the EU market in general. With Russia still shut off and less fruit expected to go to the UK, we are concerned where all the imports of berries coming to major

ports in mainland Europe will end up. It could also be a problem during the EU season since Poland and other major berry producers deliver significant volumes to the UK, easing the movement and giving good prices here.

I do not like to give political opinions in business – business is no place for politics, I believe. I wish the best for UK citizen and European citizens alike, however I am concerned about how the political change will impact the market.

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