



By Carl Collen

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## Smart sorting

LBP Rotterdam has invested in new blueberry packing technology as demand for the fruit continues on an upward trajectory



The Ellips blueberry sorter from Elifab at LBP Rotterdam Picture: @maaikepetri

**T**he blueberry business continues to boom, and logistics leader LBP Rotterdam has taken steps to ensure that it is keeping up with demand for the little blue fruit by investing in a new optical sorting line from Spanish group Elifab.

"We have a new blueberry packing line from Elifab which we are now using together with our existing two lines from BBC Technology," explains Anton Filippo, LBP's commercial director. "This is an optical sorter with two separate lanes, which means we can pack 125g of berries on one side and 300g on the other side. This is a big improvement on what we had before."

The scope of the technology is impressive in its detail, according to Filippo, who has been suitably wowed by what he has seen so far. "These sorters take out the defects, foreign materials and measure softness, colour,

sizing and so many other things, they're fantastic," he says. "You can say 'I want 2 per cent softness, 5 per cent sizing limits of 12mm' and it is done. We as users need to get used to it, but I can't speak highly enough of the technology."

Improving LBP's capacity to deal with increased blueberry volumes has been crucial, given the fruit's strong appeal. Filippo outlines how the demand for blueberry packing in the Netherlands at the moment – for the period between September and April – is much bigger than the country can actually offer. "But as we work two shifts in packing, Monday to Friday and then Saturdays up to the end of the afternoon, we could probably do double the work if we had the equipment available. The business continues to grow so much.

"At our peak, we do over 100 containers per week of blueberries from different shippers, and that's a

huge volume," he continues. "And that is just us – there are of course others like us also receiving these containers. We often talk about the avocado business doing well, but the growth of the blueberry business is probably even bigger."

Demand continues to outstrip supply, even if there are points when the market gets oversaturated. "There are certain times, for example with all this supply from Chile, when the market says 'hold on, we need to slow down a little bit here', and this is reflected in pricing too. But ultimately, blueberries are still booming," Filippo confirms.

**Interview conducted with Anton Filippo at Fruit Logisitca in Berlin, in February**