



By Tom Joyce

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Perla ready for new campaign

Having invested in a new optical cherry line and implemented strict Covid-19 measures, Turkey's Perla Fruit is prepared for the upcoming cherry season, says executive chairman Kerim Taner



Do you have any news ahead of the new cherry season in Turkey?

Kerim Taner: Perla Fruit has invested in the most advanced optical cherry line, Compac InVision-2 to be ready for this summer. We recently completed the installation of the line, as well as receiving three mobile hydro-coolers, giving us a daily capacity of 200 tonnes.

Is the season on time? What date do you expect the first volumes?

KT: The season is delayed for a few days due to cool temperatures in March and April. The first cherries are expected around 25 May, followed by the central regions in the first week of June. Our main variety will be Ziraat 0900 followed by Regina starting in week 25.

What sort of volumes do you expect? Will volumes be affected by the coronavirus crisis?

KT: The yields in every region are looking promising, with no effect from

the frost yet. Our growers have followed all the necessary procedures in order to deliver good quality cherries in spite of any effects of the coronavirus crisis.

Are there any issues when it comes to labour, either for harvesting or packing?

KT: We do not expect any major labour shortages for harvesting or packing by the time we start. At Perla Fruit, we have developed a proactive coronavirus action plan in order to manage all the risks and protect our growers, workers, customers and consumers.

What markets are you currently targeting for growth?

KT: Our main markets for cherries are Germany and Scandinavia in Europe with Hong Kong, China, Singapore and Malaysia in East Asia. We are also planning some volumes for Russia.

Will the Covid-19 crisis affect your ability to reach certain markets, such as in Asia?

KT:

We are planning a strong programme for East Asia, using daily cargo planes. However, the cost of shipments may be higher this year due to the limited number of passenger flights.

Do you expect many logistical issues due to the pandemic?

KT: We expect trade between countries to improve in the coming weeks while economies start reopening. We may see some cost increases if there is an imbalance between export and import volumes.

How will closures of restaurants and hotels affect you? Are you able to redirect supplies?

KT: Our customer base is the supermarkets through direct distribution channels. We do not focus on the hospitality or catering businesses. However, any decrease in demand that our customers experience from these outlets may affect us indirectly.

Are you involved in any communication

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

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campaigns? Is it important to keep your staff and customers well informed at such a time?

KT: We support our customers in planning and managing timely and aggressive marketing campaigns. Perla uses Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn to reach its grower base, workforce and customers.

These unprecedented and uncertain times require clear and timely communication. At the beginning of the crisis, we established the Perla Fruit Covid-19 Board in order to understand the problem and risks and to find solutions in a proactive manner. We developed an action

plan and shared this with our customers, growers, workers and all stakeholders. This type of crisis demands a holistic approach. We are still learning and improving our plan accordingly. We understand the challenges and are prepared for the new world.

Is climate change also a worry for the future? Is sustainability a focus at the company?

KT: This year, Turkey had a good winter with enough rain and snow, so our water resources look promising. But sustainability is an important part of Perla's strategy. We are engaged in an intensive research programme to develop alternative packaging to plastic.

The roof of our new facility is fully covered with solar panels which provide 70 per cent of our annual power needs. In addition, Perla is investing heavily in hardware technology and software coding in order to support its 'paperless' strategy. In 2020 and 2021, we will decrease the use of paper by 50 per cent and 70 per cent respectively. All our Quality Control, Food Safety, Grower Base and Inventory Management procedures are online and available in real time.