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La Dona opens Colombian lime packhouse



Company says state-of-the-art facility will revolutionise the packing of Tahiti limes in Colombia

Latin American tropical fruit specialist La Dona Fruit will officially open its new Valle Verde packhouse and coldstore for Tahiti limes in Antioquia, Colombia this week.

Equipped with state-of-the-art packing technology, the 1,542m² facility can pack up to 1,000 tonnes of limes a month.

The company said it would cement its objective of becoming the largest lime exporter in Colombia, and serve as the launch pad for exports to the US and the Caribbean, to complement its existing business in Europe.

Colombia can supply limes for 52 weeks of the year, and La Dona will be focusing on specific windows to plug the gaps in global production from September to November, and from January to March.

La Dona doubled its lime exports to Europe this summer and said it is looking to welcome more growers into

the fold to help maximise capacity at the new packhouse as it broadens its markets.

Currently, there are 450ha of limes under production within La Dona's grower network, which will grow to 1,200ha next year as more farms come online. From 2021, monthly exports will triple in volume to Europe, the US and the Caribbean.

The inauguration, which can be viewed [live via Zoom](#), will take place on Thursday, 15 October. It will be attended by Colombia's Minister of Commerce, Industry and Tourism, as well as the Vice-Minister of Agricultural Affairs; the US Ambassador; and ProColombia's vice presidents of US Foreign Investment and Agro-Exports.

The packhouse is managed by agricultural investment management company Farmfolio, and has been built to bespoke specifications.

The machinery features infra-red sorting, sanitising, drying, waxing, and

classifying modules. This will enable La Dona to implement a highly automated and fast packing process, as well as homogeneous quality and sizes. By December, the facility will be certified by GlobalGAP and SMETA.

Dax Cooke, Farmfolio's founder and La Dona's head of global marketing & sales, said: "I truly believe that Valle Verde will change the landscape for limes in Colombia for years to come.

"This packhouse is dedicated to limes first and foremost, and that is our biggest point of difference. Every other facility packing limes in Colombia is focused on avocados first. "They are not able to screen limes accurately, they lack the logistical channels to distribute limes effectively, and they don't have agronomy programmes in place with the growers to guarantee consistently top quality limes. This is what separates La Dona Fruit from the rest."

Oscar Baracaldo, La Dona's head of customer experience, added: "Although

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

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Colombia has been exporting limes for nearly a decade, the sector presents high opportunity for disruption.

"After packing in third party facilities during the last year, we can now confidently say that we operate the best lime packing technology in Colombia. Furthermore, our Valle Verde packhouse is located strategically within Colombia's Free Trade Zone in Urabá, which is close to two Atlantic ports.

"This awards us major advantages over our direct competitors in Colombia in terms of maximum product freshness, as well as tax-free machinery and electronic equipment."

The company recently firmed up agreements for exports to begin to the US in October and is distributing to wholesale markets throughout Europe via its own La Dona channel.

"Overall, we are shipping 4-6 containers per week to the US and Europe. We're also speaking with French, Spanish and Italian importers about establishing direct, fixed programmes year-round," Cooke said.

"We want to create stability on the lime market through fixed programmes with fixed prices to develop a sustainable business for the growers and our investors."

The La Dona model is based upon establishing direct grower relationships, and its Tahiti lime venture Valle Verde is no different.

By having our own packhouse we remove the need for third party players," added Baracaldo. "We buy the limes directly from the growers in order to pack and ship directly from our facility. As we expand the business for our investors, we will be supporting our

lime growers to produce a superior product, and to enjoy a better quality life."

Baracaldo added: "Colombia is a very young lime producer with the potential to become a considerable supplier. We look forward to solving more challenges along this journey."

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