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Asia Briefing explores European apples



The second weekly online briefing ahead of Asia Fruit Logistica ON focused on the efforts of European apple exporters in Asia

With Europe's apple season underway Asia Briefing: Apples investigated the challenges and opportunities for European apple exporters in Asia.

The online event on 14 October was the second of a series of weekly market updates being hosted by Fruitnet ahead of Asia Fruit Logistica ON.

Mike Knowles, editor of Eurofruit, introduced the session and outlined how Asia was becoming increasingly open and receptive to European apples.

"For an increasing number of European apple suppliers, Asia is fast emerging as a really important place to do business," said Knowles.

"Last year Europe sold more apples to the region than ever before and with a steadily expanding portfolio of licenced club varieties in their back pocket, the prospects of a European apple rush in Asia over the next decade are very real indeed."

Wayne Prowse of Fresh Intelligence Consulting provided a statistical overview of the Asian apple market in 2019. Prowse said ASEAN markets had embraced imported apples bringing in 900,000 tonnes in 2019, while India led the way in Asia importing 250,000 tonnes in 2019, down 11 per cent from 2018.

China was the largest supplier of apples to the Asian region exporting 915,000 tonnes in 2019, up 37 per cent year-on-year. Europe exported 179,000 tonnes to Asia mostly to India, where it surpassed the US as the largest supplier in 2019, and Malaysia.

Marc Peyres, commercial director at Blue Whale, then provided an insight into the French exporter's approach to the Asian market.

Going into the season Peyres said predictions of a smaller crop may come as an advantage if potential challenges created by Covid-19, such as disruption to distribution channels and caution from importers, emerge.

However, Peyres said lower supply matched with higher demand for fruit would bode well for the new varieties Blue Whale is trying to establish in Asia

"Luckily we have less supply this year and demand is quite strong, when demand is strong we can put more effort into new varieties than when the market is oversupplied," Peyres said.

Peyres said more focus was being placed on new varieties adapted to the taste of the Asian market such as Candine, as it can take decades to establish a variety.

"We have to adapt, use more social media, work with people in the market in Asia to do promotions," Peyres said.

One approach taken by Italy's leading apple exporters has been to work together via partnership called FROM in certain markets including India.

Nicola Zanotelli is director of From, spoke about how From had been able to build its market share while competitors such as

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He said From was determined to meet the desires of importers and consumers by developing a "specific taste, secured storable quality, planning capabilities, a shorter transit time and brands".

Zanotelli said From wanted to differentiate from other importers and explore the different tastes of Indian consumers.

"In the beginning we were asked to replicate what they were used to... but once you start copying you become second."

Coming to Asia for the first time this season are Melinda apples thanks to a partnership between Melinda and Naturitalia. Andrea Fedrizzi of Melinda said the market presents a great opportunity for a brand that has become so familiar in Europe.

"We believe the Asian market the can give the right value to a premium brand and we expect this market can enhance premium quality products like Melinda."

Augusto Renella of Naturitalia said the partnership, which emerged from a meeting at Asia Fruit Logistica in 2018, had the two businesses working together like one.

Renella said a range of macroeconomic factors would make Melinda's entry into Asia a successful including the region's population growth.

"There are a lot of vegetarians in the area, so it means high consumption of fresh fruit and vegetables," Renella said. "There is a growing buying power of the middle class in Asia so in the future more consumers will be able to buy imported fruits."

Renella finished by identifying Singapore, Hong Kong, Malaysia Indonesia, Vietnam and Thailand as target markets for Melinda.

Stay tuned for more

Fruitnet is set to host

four more weekly episodes of Asia Briefing each Wednesday at 2:30pm Singapore/China. In next week's episode (21 October) Fruitnet talks to Harrij Schmeitz, the host Smart Horticulture Asia, one of the Asia Fruit Logistica Hall Forums.

Later in the series, Asia Briefing will talk to the host of Cool Logistics Asia, Alex von Stempel (4 November) followed by a focus on marketing to China post-pandemic (28 October) and the future of Asia's burgeoning avocado market (11 November).

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