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By Mike Knowles

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Fruitnet launches event for south-east Europe



Opportunities to develop exports and build new markets will be focus at Fruitnet Forum South-East Europe in Belgrade

Fruitnet Media International is delighted to announce the launch of **Fruitnet Forum South-East Europe**, the first in a new series of discussion and networking events designed to promote interest, investment and innovation in new and emerging areas of the fresh produce business.

Organised by leading industry publication Eurofruit, part of publishing group Fruitnet Media International, and taking place at the Hyatt Regency Belgrade on 29-30 November, the high-profile event will focus on the apparent strong potential in south-east Europe to grow the fresh fruit and vegetable industry.

In particular, it will draw attention to new commercial opportunities that may exist for companies to develop exports, for buyers to source from the region and for marketers to sell their products there.

The conference itself will feature presentations from key players with a direct involvement in south-east Europe's horticultural sector, as well as expert comment and analysis from a mixture of regional and international players including retailers, importers, exporters, producers and service providers.

Growing interest

Across this part of Europe, interest in agriculture and especially horticulture is said to be growing dramatically, with investors showing more interest recently in the region's potential as a fresh produce supplier amid doubts about the profitability of other traditional industries.

As a result of its considerable natural resources, many believe that south-east Europe has massive opportunities not only to add value in established

categories like apples and pears but also to establish the region as a new and alternative source of high-value products like, for example, asparagus, berries and stonefruit.

Improvements in production and supply chains are already having an impact, contributing to the success of various grower-exporters in the region and enabling them to deliver the kind of high-spec products required by modern, developed markets across Europe and beyond.

But with those opportunities come challenges. The region's suppliers need to ensure they have the right kinds of product, in the right condition, at the right time. The potential to produce and export is huge, but which markets should they be targeting and what is the best way to ensure supply is met with demand? Fruitnet Forum South-East

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

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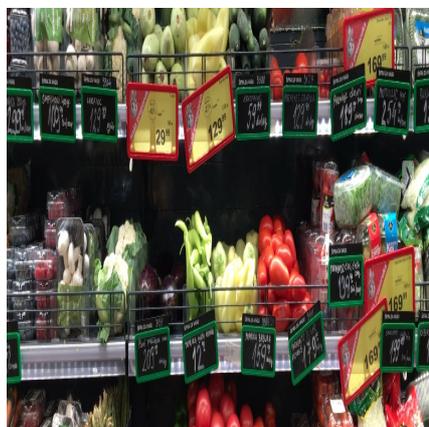
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Europe's goal is to uncover where the demand lies, either in the region itself or beyond, and how best to go about satisfying that demand.

Fruitnet Forum South-East Europe offers existing players and potential investors in the region's fresh fruit and vegetable business the chance to:

- Learn about the market opportunity for produce grown in the region
- Understand how funding for new projects can be acquired
- Hear from those already investing in projects to supply international markets
- Find out what the market requires in areas such as branding, marketing and merchandising
- Discover practical ways to improve the quality of products through better organisation, good agricultural practice, certification and investment in new technology
- Avoid running into trouble by knowing what challenges might lie ahead

[Click here to visit the official Fruitnet Forum South-East Europe website](#)



Growing opportunities

Interest and indeed investment in south-east Europe is certainly at an all-time high, largely as a result of various EU programmes that together are pouring hundreds of millions of euros into projects throughout the region. These include the European Union Danube

Transnational Programme, the Balkan-Mediterranean Programme and Adriatic Ionian Programme, all of which are backed by the European Regional Development Fund and IPA II – the EU's €11.7bn Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance.

With Slovenia, Romania, Bulgaria and Croatia already members of the EU, the prospect of the region's remaining official candidates – Serbia, Montenegro, Albania and Macedonia – and potential candidates Bosnia and Kosovo taking a similar step appears likely, albeit by no means guaranteed. As a result, investors have an opportunity to create supply in the region that might soon be able to tap into a massive tariff-free market.

At the same time, growth could well come in markets to the east. Serbia, for example, is currently negotiating a trade deal with the Eurasian Economic Union.

South-east Europe also has structural advantages as a potential source of fresh fruit and vegetables, not least a geographically strategic position between Europe and Asia. Belgrade itself lies at the intersection of Pan-European Corridors VII and X, the latter connecting Europe with Turkey and the Middle East beyond.

For producers in the region, there is also an opportunity to catch up fast and take advantage of many decades of learning in other countries, for example in areas such as good agricultural practice, certification and the use of modern technology and techniques.

Looking around and ahead

The conference itself will concentrate on the following topics:

Setting the scene: current landscape and 2020 outlook

As companies, investors and entrepreneurs in South-East Europe look to capitalise on growing demand for fresh produce in a number of international markets, what kind of potential is there in the region to establish sustainable and profitable business ventures operating in

the fresh fruit and vegetable sector? How should such ventures be organised and funded? Which particular opportunities should they target? And what will be the major challenges for those investing in the region over the next few years?

Emerging potential: new sources of fresh produce in South-East Europe

Following on from the opening session, we will proceed to look more closely at areas that show particular promise as far as South-East Europe's fresh produce business is concerned. Which products look set to be the region's star performers over the coming five years? Which countries, regions and companies will supply these products? And what challenges and obstacles stand between them and future commercial success?

Emerging opportunities: sizing up prospective markets at home and abroad

With interest in South-East Europe's fresh fruit and vegetable business reported to be increasing significantly, what potential is there for fresh produce suppliers to achieve commercial success in the international market? And what about their chances of securing new business in South-East Europe itself?

Driving productivity: practical methods for securing growth

How can fruit and vegetable producers in South-East Europe grow their sales, expand their markets and achieve greater returns? During our final session, we will consider various ways in which the region's suppliers can: make targeted investments in technology to improve quality; introduce new certification standards to guarantee supply; take active steps to make their production more efficient; and learn about ways in which education and institutional frameworks can offer better commercial prospects in the future.

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