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By Michael Barker

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Room for Manoeuvre?

Poland is a key mushroom source for the UK market, which relies on imports to ensure it can meet demand. Michael Barker speaks to producer Grzybmar to find out how supply is shaping up and how it is bracing for Brexi



Poland is the world's largest mushroom exporter, shifting some \$350 million of the popular vegetable overseas in 2016 [OEC], and the UK is its second-largest market, after Germany, taking 20 per cent of the crop.

It's no surprise therefore that Britain is so reliant upon its European neighbour, given that the £418m UK retail mushroom category is in strong value and volume growth but is less than 50 per cent self-sufficient in production.

With a major marketing campaign highlighting the versatility of the product and the temperature starting to drop, there's optimism among suppliers for a good few months ahead. "With the weather turning cold, the menus change as well, seasonal products disappear and mushrooms take an important place in dishes," explains Adam Matuszewski, chief executive at Grzybmar.

As well as being more popular, higher production and transport costs have contributed to the value rise in the category, with swings in currency exchange rates adding volatility to the sector.

Polish mushroom production suffered from the hot summer weather that hit most of Europe, but growers report that supply is back to normal and is at full capacity. There will, however, be the usual disruption in January as Matuszewski points out that production is limited in the new year when Ukrainian pickers return home to celebrate Christmas and renew their documentation to work in Poland.

The medium-term picture has been complicated by Britain's impending departure from the EU, which is proving unsettling for suppliers. Grzybmar, for example, has plans to expand its packing and cooling warehouses, but the

producer is waiting to see how Brexit plays out – particularly given the likely swings in sterling's value over the coming months – before making its move.

"The Brexit situation is one of the biggest concerns because we don't know what exporting to the UK will look like," says Matuszewski. "Will there be customs requirements or any delays at the border? What will the value of sterling look like? Will Brexit actually take place at the end of March or will it be postponed?"

If supply can remain unrestricted, Poland will expect to remain a principal supplier to the UK market for years to come.

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

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