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By Carl Collen

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High five for PBC

Mateusz Pilch, Dorota Zęgota and Agata Małkiewicz update Fruitnet on the latest from the Polish Berry Cooperative



The Polish Berry Cooperative at Fruit Logistica 2020

What has 2020 brought for the Polish Berry Cooperative?

Mateusz Pilch: This year we are celebrating the fifth anniversary of the Polish Berry Cooperative (PBC), which brought together three major Polish blueberry producers' organisations: BerryGroup, Elliot and Polskie Jagody. It was the first initiative of this kind in the Polish soft fruit market.

Quality-based integration has translated into an increase in sales of Polish blueberries around the world. This approach was valid when we started our cooperation, but in the rapidly changing blueberry market of today it is becoming even more crucial. Our 30-minute standard, which means that all fruit is pre-cooled within 30 minutes of picking, allows our blueberries to keep their quality for longer. In turn, the '7 Rules of Good Harvest', developed jointly by PBC, are instrumental in training our pickers.

How has the coronavirus pandemic affected your business and the market?

the blueberry market, so we are investing

Dorota Zęgota: At first, we were very worried about availability of labour for weeding and picking, but it turned out that with proper organisation this challenge has been overcome. Also, it seems that our employer branding efforts are paying off. We have mixed feelings about the effects of the pandemic on the European berry market. On the one hand, the demand for fruit and berries is said to be growing, but in July we have not seen a dramatic increase in sales.

Are there any new markets that you are exporting to?

Agata Małkiewicz: This season we started to supply organic blueberries to Germany, where demand for organic produce is growing rapidly during the pandemic. Our strawberry production is also increasing, and we started to supply this fruit to the German market in addition to Scandinavia.

How is the domestic market in Poland performing?

AM

: Consumption of soft fruit is growing in Poland each year. The industry-led 'Time for Polish Superfruit' campaign promoting consumption of domestic soft fruit, including blueberries, has proven very successful. Moreover, during the pandemic eating healthy became even more important than before. According to recent research, 98 per cent of Poles are aware of the health benefits of eating fresh produce, and soft fruit – being now in season – is benefiting from this.

The pandemic has also led more people to focus on local, seasonal fruit and this season 'U-pick' events are being held for the first time on blueberry farms. But that does not mean that consumers are shifting away from premium fruit in convenience packaging; our XXL blueberries sold in shakers are still heavily popular.

Are there any new varieties that are exciting you commercially?

MP: We believe that new genetics will be key to ensuring further development of

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

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heavily in acquiring and testing new varieties, but it is still too early to share the details.

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