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By Mike Knowles

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## **Fruitbox 49 · Robert Wells, SH Pratt Group**

As the UK slips its EU moorings, the head of the country's largest banana firm remains confident it will be plain sailing

**C**hange is in the air as the UK prepares to cut loose from its trading alliance with the EU. When it comes to banana imports, however, it's likely to be business as usual from 1 January 2021, even if the country's importers remain wary of potential disruption to the labour provision and logistical services on which they depend.

"That's where we're probably spending most of our time and energy, on making sure that those two things run as smoothly as possible," says Robert Wells, chief executive of the UK's biggest banana company SH Pratt, who was speaking in the latest episode of Fruitnet's conversation series Fruitbox. "Those countries that we're sourcing from have already made individual agreements with the UK government to continue."

In many respects, the single-variety,

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low-margin banana trade represents very much the steady ship on a troubled sea as the UK's fresh produce importers look to steer their business safely over the Brexit cliff-edge and land in calmer waters.

The idea that people are not prepared to pay more for bananas – in marked contrast to berries, the category that has now overtaken bananas as the UK's most valuable produce category – is one that does not seem to trouble Wells.

"Of course I'd like to see greater value put on bananas and greater value going back to the growers, who have to take the risk every day of the week, every week of the year, to grow bananas in all sorts of challenging conditions," he says.

"However, we must recognise that bananas are now regarded in the retail world as a staple item, and in the same basket as potatoes, carrots, topfruit and other things that are not really in the

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same category as berries. I've seen the rise of berries, but I don't think that has detracted from the appeal of bananas."

Hosted by Chris White in London, Fruitbox now attracts a big audience across the global fruit and vegetable business that tunes in every week to hear exclusive interviews and expert analysis. Produced by Fruitnet Media International, the show is essential listening for everyone in the fresh produce industry.

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