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By Mike Knowles

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Fruitbox 72 - Orlando Wong, Able Freight



Able Freight's CEO explains how the pandemic has had a dramatic impact on the perishable logistics industry

The importance of air cargo services to the global fresh produce business has certainly taken off in the past 18 months as the Covid-19 pandemic has landed ocean container shipping networks with a major circulation problem.

As Orlando Wong explains in the latest episode of Fruitnet's conversation series Fruitbox, a sharp increase in demand for consumer goods in the world's major markets has led to logjams in ports that where the traffic previously flowed freely.

"The last I checked there were about 64 vessels waiting to come into dock at [the Port of] Long Beach," he reveals. "The situation has really not improved. The container yard is quadruple stacked, [whereas] normally it's only double stacked. Essentially, Long Beach is now like a storage dock. There is no room to work around, and the infrastructure needs to be expanded in a big way."

Wong is CEO of perishable produce logistics specialist Able Freight, and from his headquarters in Los Angeles he can see firsthand the pandemic's impact on both sea and airfreight.

And despite a simultaneous decline in the number of passenger flights circumventing the earth, he says it's also apparent that airlines are working to free up new space for cargo to take to the skies.

"It's been a very challenging 18 months. Obviously it started with 95 per cent of all international passenger flights suspended. So we had to look elsewhere, mostly at charter airlines, for cargo capacity," he recalls.

Reach for the sky

In effect, the new normal for airfreight may well involve a larger volume of temperature- and time-sensitive cargo capacity being in the sky.

"We were very fortunate that the airlines started to put their thinking caps on, and started converting passenger planes to cargo planes. So that really helped a big deal."

During his 15-minute chat with Fruitnet's Chris White, Wong also considers the ongoing effect of fuel price inflation, the potential for new models of electrified transportation, and the importance of making supply chain temperature control even more visible.

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