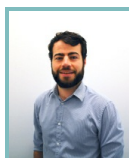


The world's leading fresh produce conference and networking events



By Liam O'Callaghan

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FPI Live discusses Covid-19 impact

Fresh Produce India Live looked at the future of the Indian market both through Covid-19 and beyond, discussing the opportunities for fresh produce



As the catalyst for Fresh Produce India's historic move online, coronavirus (Covid-19) was one of the major talking points as the programme delved into the future of the Indian market and domestic production.

The opening session of Fresh Produce India Live – the first-ever fresh produce business conference designed for mobile devices and live-streamed on 23 April – explored the prospects of the Indian market through the pandemic and beyond.

Introducing the session was Ruchira Jain, founder of Elevate Insights, who identified some of the forces that will shape the growth of the market in the coming years.

She highlighted rising incomes, the urban demographic of consumers, digital adoption and the change of the social structures of the country, with 65 per

cent of the population under the age of 35.

When it came to the effects of coronavirus, Jain said the fresh produce industry might not be affected as much as other sectors given its essential designation, however, the economic impact of the pandemic would affect the purchasing power of consumers.

This may create an opportunity for premium products as high-end consumers will be least affected by the downturn, but exporters targeting India will have to work to ensure their provenance stories aren't co-opted by the damage of the coronavirus.

Detailing the impacts of the fresh fruit trade in India was Parth Karvat, executive director of importer Yupaa Fresh, who described the initial disruption after a nationwide lockdown was implemented.

Karvat said while some operations can be resumed it is difficult to predict how the pandemic will pan out given the disconnected nature of India.

"After a couple of weeks things did start to get a little better and the operations became smoother. It's not like normal, but still it is not as bad as a lot of people expected it to be," said Karvat.

"Every city or town is operating differently depending on what the population, what the government and health authorities are doing in that region, what the agriculture produce marketing committees are doing... there's a lot of irregularities and a lot of difference in the way parts of India are operating in the fresh sector."

Further outlining what trends will remain beyond the pandemic was Keith Sunderlal, president and chief executive of The SCS Group.

Sunderlal focused on two trends which may be a part of a 'new normal', firstly the trend of the lockdown creating a new wave

focus to production in India and different ways some companies are investing in their future.

Express was able to grow a healthy and sustainable crop in regions others had ignored positioning it to tap into the vast

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

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of home cooking.

“Even men are trying to play around and cook in India. Cooking at home is here to stay, and restaurants here are going to take a huge hit, not just in the immediate-term but even into the medium-term” said Sunderlal.

These new home cooks will be supplied by what Sunderlal described as the revitalisation of the kirana store, India’s small neighbourhood stores.

“People talk about delivery. Well, the real deliveries that were coming were only from the kirana stores. Amazon and all the other big players were not allowed to do anything non-essential,” said Sunderlal. “Also, the only places that were open and had supplies were the little kirana stores. So they have come back with a big bang.”

Facebook’s [recent](#) US\$5.7bn investment in Reliance Industries’ tech subsidiary Jio Platforms, illustrates how big players are looking to leverage on India’s network of kiranas, he said.

“I live in complex with 500 apartments, the little shop downstairs will know what we want, and they will supply exactly what this neighbourhood wants,” said Sunderlal.

“That kind of micro-targeting at your doorstep is something unheard of globally, it is a brand-new paradigm hitting us and it is going to be really interesting to watch.”

Sustainable production

The second session switched

Yvonne and Mark Tweddle, joint owners of UK-based Jupiter Group, spoke of the company’s table grape investment in India in partnership with Sahyadri Farms.

In addition to introducing new Arra varieties to the country Jupiter Group has focused on giving back to communities and creating a sustainable business model.

“Everything in the market is trying to add value, so it is creating points of difference whether that is on a varietal basis, whether that is the transparency you provide in a supply chain, whether that is the sustainable messages you are giving,” said Mark.

Yvonne said these initiatives are not only creating a more consistent product and adding value to the industry, but they can differentiate the company’s product.

“The important thing for us at the moment is that our retailers understand that we are doing these things as responsible suppliers and as responsible growers and it’s important that they share the responsibility of getting that across to consumers,” said Yvonne. “Hopefully there is a combined effort to infiltrate the consumers’ understanding.”

Nina Patil, director of Indian table grape grower-exporter Fresh Express, added to the theme by sharing how the company’s investment in its people and plants was paying dividends.

By using biological farming, which focuses on natural methods, and empowering a female workforce Fresh

Indian market and command a premium.

“India has a huge domestic market and there is definitely a demand for good, premium fruit, when it is biologically grown, better tasting, safely packed it has all the certifications,” Patel said.

Another area of investment which holds potential in India in protected cropping, and Richard Vollebregt, president and chief executive of Cravo Equipment, discussed the evaluations the company has been undertaking in India.

Through technologies such as Cravo’s automated retractable roof systems, Vollebregt said growers are able to protect against the dangers of weather and adjust conditions to avoid the peak supply to the market.

“The focus here is to understand what does the market want and when does it want it? And how do you create the climate to manipulate the plants, so you can achieve the quality and the timing for when the market actually wants what you are growing,” Vollebregt said.

Although Vollebregt said technologies like Cravo’s suited some crops more than others, the key was to evaluate the economics of each investment to ensure there is value to be found.

Read [more](#) about Fresh Produce India Live on Fruitnet over the coming days. A full report on the event will appear in the May edition of Asiafruit Magazine.