



By Mike Knowles

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Fruitbox: Is the next Chile in Central Asia?



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How former Soviet republics like Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan are playing a bigger role in the global produce market

Andriy Yarmak, economist at the United Nations FAO Investment Centre, spends a large part of his time monitoring developments in central Asia's fresh produce business.

As Yarmak explains in the latest episode of Fruitbox, recent developments in countries like Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan reflect a growing interest in the region as a potentially global source of fruits and vegetables.

Last year, for example, German buyers purchased fresh table grapes and persimmons from this part of the world, while the UK took a small but significant volume of sweet cherries from Uzbekistan.

China too is actively looking to source more from central Asia, Yarmak notes, and even though Russia remains the dominant buyer in the region, it's clear that these countries are going to play a bigger role in the international fruit and veg market in years to come.

"They're important because they are among the top global players already, and many people don't realise it," Yarmak tells Fruitnet's Chris White. "Uzbekistan stands out. It's already among the largest producers of many different types of fruit and vegetable. For example, it's the second-largest exporter of raisins in the world, the second-largest exporter of apricots in the world, and the third-largest global exporter of fresh apricots."

What's more, the quality and taste of products being grown in central Asia is "just amazing", he adds. "They have a unique, very dry climate with a lot of sunny days, and it's really hot in summer. But it's also pretty cold in winter. I would compare Uzbekistan with Chile in some ways. It's fairly remote from consumers, but it can reach them with a variety of products."

Hosted by Chris White in London, Fruitbox now attracts a big audience across the global fruit and vegetable business that tunes in twice a 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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