

The world's leading fresh produce conference and networking events



By Mike Knowles

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## Asia's fresh produce trade bounces back

### Asiafruit Congress ON speakers say they are optimistic about the future of fruit and vegetable sales in the region

Asia's fresh fruit and vegetable business appears to be recovering well from various challenges presented by the Covid-19 outbreak.

That was the stand-out message from the final session of Asiafruit Congress ON, a virtual edition of Asia's leading conference and networking event for the fresh produce industry.

Joining Fruitnet's Chris White to discuss the pandemic's impact were Konna Mu of Chinese distributor Joy Wing Mau, Wipavee Watcharakorn of Thai importer Vachamon Food, Charif Christian Carvajal of the Chilean Fruit Exporters Association, and Wayne Prowse of Fresh Intelligence Consulting, based in Australia.

"We really feel like we're back to normal," said Konna Mu, who observed that a shift to more online retailing was

already well established as a trend prior to the crisis. "We just had one of the best Washington cherry seasons with record high prices," he added.

The pandemic was an unexpected challenge, Carvajal admitted. "Luckily we have very good partners in all Asia's key markets, who kept us up to date," he told the congress.

"Sales were slow because of a lack of workers – logistics, ports etc – and the whole supply chain just got slower and slower. But I'm cautiously optimistic, because at no point during this pandemic has our fruit stopped flowing into Asia."

Not all markets have bounced back strongly right away. In Thailand, for example, the loss of major revenue streams due to restrictions on foreign visitors continues to affect the country's economy.



Pictured clockwise from top left: Chris White, Fruitnet (UK), Konna Mu, Joy Wing Mau (China), Wayne Prowse, Fresh Intelligence Consulting (Australia), Charif Christian Carvajal, Chilean Fruit Exporters Association (Chile), and Wipavee Watcharakorn, Vachamon Food (Thailand)

"Thailand is a tourism-based economy and so some consumers have been affected and had to cut down on their spending," commented Watcharakorn. "Food is one of the categories where they cut spending first."

But there are signs of recovery as far as imported produce is concerned, said Prowse. "Some markets have been down more than others," he noted. "In China we've seen increases in some industries that we thought might be down – grapes and stonefruit out of Australia, for example."

Markets and customers have also adapted to the challenge of being unable to meet suppliers and marketers in person.

"In China, we've seen a rise in e-commerce and especially live-streaming," revealed Carvajal. "Now we see retailers doing their own live streaming from the actual store."

All of the sessions from Asiafruit Congress ON will be available to watch

Asia Fruit Logistica ON takes place online on 18-20 November.

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