



By Mike Knowles

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Fruitbox 48 · Marc Evrard, BFV



The commercial director of Belgium's largest fruit exporter offers his view on Brexit and other changes in the global market

The looming possibility of a no-deal Brexit might be a major headache for some in the fresh produce business, but for the commercial director of one of Belgium's largest fruit exporters it's uncertainty, rather than the probable impact, that is causing most concern.

In late November, as BFV's Marc Evrard awaited the outcome of talks between London and Brussels to agree the terms of the UK's future trading relationship with the EU, he told Fruitbox he remained happy that any Brexit-related bumps in the road would not be insurmountable.

"I think probably the market will still be there," he commented. "It might be slightly more complicated or more hassle to reach the market. Definitely there are challenges – tariffs or congestion at entry points, for example – but these will not have any effect on the shelf-life of the fruit. So I don't have any

worries there. We can easily deliver one day to the next, and be there just in time."

That said, could Brexit be about to cloud the UK's trading landscape, and perhaps nudge a proportion of the group's sizeable Conference pear deal in the UK, where it sold 28,000 tonnes last year, towards other less troublesome markets? In fact, BFV appears to be especially well prepared for such an eventuality.

"The thing is, at the start of the noughties we were already aware of the fact that we didn't want to depend too much on one large market as a whole. At that time, we had Russia in mind, so we started working out different scenarios on targeting other markets," Evrard explains, referring to recent expansion into India, China, Brazil and Mexico.

"Some of these might even have looked utopian, but simultaneously we also targeted markets closer to home, like

Spain and Germany. Go back ten years and we hardly sold a kilo of Conference pears in the German market. Now we sell roughly 17m kilos there each year."

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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