

*By director of leading Indian fresh fruit importer IG International, Tarun Arora*



Chilean fruits have huge potential in India, particularly cherries, kiwifruit and plums because these fruits are grown in very small quantities here.

Cherries this year were outstanding, and though the market currently is very small, there is a large appetite with consumers preferring their fruit firm and a dark red color. The pace of growth of cherries over the last couple of years is also amazing. The biggest motivation for consumers in any market is pricing. Chile is undoubtedly the most reasonable in pricing fruits compared with other countries.

This year a Chilean cherry shipment arrived in close to 44 days and more importantly it was successful in the Indian market. If this time can be reduced to say 30-34 days then this will play a vital role in increasing access in the Indian market. In fact, there is the potential for Chile to develop the Indian market in much the way it has done in China and become a substantial player in providing cherries.

Kiwifruit volumes also increased with consumers preferring blondish fruit without fur. Preferred plum varieties are Angelinos.

More intensive promotions in the Indian market will also play a vital role in increasing further demand for Chilean produce as well as increasing consumer awareness and loyalty. The Washington Apple Commission is undoubtedly the leader in promoting their produce in India. I have not seen any other country, or association, promote themselves so aggressively. They have just signed up as sponsors for India's Premier League cricket. The investment has worked because in the last month, Feb. 15-Mar.15, India imported 850,000 (20 kilogram) boxes of Washington apples out of the total 2.3 million boxes of apple imports. Overall there has been a 25% year-on-year rise in apple imports.

There is potential for Chile to sell more apples in India if it can extend the time frame for shipping for an extra month to week 22. The most popular varieties are Red Delicious and Royal Gala, followed by Granny Smiths, Pink Lady and Golden Delicious.

The increase in Chilean imports has been significant, despite custom duties as high as 50% for apples and 30% for kiwifruit, citrus, pears and cherries. If a fair trade agreement is signed in the near future between the two countries then India will be able capable of consuming all of Chile's produce.

Other main imports include Packham's pears from South Africa, but not a lot of apples as Indian prefer varieties such as Red Delicious. Royal Gala imports from New Zealand have grown substantially and the country is the fourth-largest exporter of apples to India. This looks certain to continue providing the country's foreign exchange rate doesn't strengthen too much.

Australia's strengthening exchange rate has detrimentally affected exports. They were originally the leader in apples, citrus, grapes and stonefruit to India but now only citrus is coming through in big quantities and they are facing tougher competition from South Africa.

India has 1.22 billion people and accounts for 17.5% of the world's population with a rising middle class who are prepared to pay to enjoy fruit all year round. The World Bank's latest economic update projected India's growth rate for the next year at 7-7.5% with the Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council projecting an even higher figure of 7.5-8%.

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