

Fields in northern Queensland have the potential to put Australia into a situation of year-round blueberry supply, an industry representative told attendees of the International Blueberry Organization (IBO) in Santiago de Chile on Tuesday.

Australian Blueberry Growers Association (ABGA) treasurer Peter McPherson said production starts in June and the season just finished, but the new regions will be able to extend supply with the help of modified atmosphere technology.


Photo: ABGA

"This area up here [points to northern Queensland] is brand new - very hot, very humid, but we're looking at establishing winter production," he said.

"Effectively within Australia in about 12 months' time we will have 52 weeks of supply."

He said Australia's planting area went up 21% last year reaching 850ha, with 4,500 metric tons (MT) of the fruit produced.

He expected volume would reach 5,000MT in 2013.

"The average hourly rate in Australia is US\$25 per hour, by far the highest anywhere in the world, so to have a sustainable industry obviously we've got to have a return on investment.

"It hasn't stopped the growth - consumption in the market is just growing year on year."

He said Australia used to have a good degree of freedom with New Zealand and South Africa in blueberry export markets from September to February, until South American competition forced the industry to look domestically with only about 5% of supply now shipped overseas.

Despite this, McPherson added that total volumes had risen by around five times in the last 12 years.

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