

Peru's blueberry industry is very young compared to the likes of Chile or Argentina, but the fruit has been gaining ground in the Andean country where crops like asparagus, grapes, avocado and citrus have achieved renown. At the International Blueberry Organization (IBO) Summit in Santiago de Chile last week, two speakers from this emerging sector gave their insights into blueberry cultivation in Peru's northern and southern coastal regions.

Ulises Quevedo, CEO of Grupo Rocio's subsidiary Talsa, spoke about the challenges of growing blueberries on Peru's northern coastline, with desert conditions where rainfall does not exceed 40mm per year. 

He said the water supply mainly came from Andean glaciers, and despite proximity to the equator the cold Humboldt Current meant the area did not have a tropical climate.

The mountains and the current protect the north coast, giving it mild temperatures throughout the year accompanied by relative humidity and little rain.

"[It] gives us a good climate for growing blueberries and other crops throughout the year," Quevedo said.

He highlighted the Chavimochic project which extends through a large part of the La Libertad department, allowing for the irrigation of around 40,000ha of desert land; a key driver of crops like asparagus, avocados, artichokes, and more recently pomegranates, tangerines, pecans and blueberries.

"The irrigation project ensures good water all year - we have a perfect environment for growing blueberries."

Quevedo pointed to two blueberry production windows in the region - from February to April and August to October.

The company had its first crop this year with 80 metric tons (MT) in the first season, and Quevedo expected 300MT to be produced in the second season.

The company started with 25ha of blueberries in 2012, added 120ha in 2013, and plans to have 600ha in the next two years.

For Miguel Bentin, president of Valle y Pampa, now is a good time for Peruvian producers to challenge themselves with more complex products such as blueberries.

He described the southern Peruvian coast as arid with variations in soil and water

conditions, summarizing all these issues under one word - "complicated".

"There aren't irrigation projects, the water is obtained from wells, and the deepness of the wells depends on the zone."

He said wind, radiation, a lack of rain and temperatures were other factors to consider when planting blueberries in the area. As he has seen "a lot of noise and a lot of enthusiasm" for blueberries in Peru, he believes the perspective needs to be cooled down.

"We know that these businesses are not for everyone, we need to know we will make mistakes and it all depends on how we handle them."

Bentin's company was formed in 2008 and added blueberries to its portfolio in 2010. It currently has 6ha and is in the process of planting 30ha. He said Valle y Pampa's first blueberries exported to the U.S. and Europe had a good reception.

"I think Peru has great potential in blueberries but you have to achieve things step by step. Peru offers a positive environment for investment, the supply chain is similar to that of the asparagus and the evidence shows that it is possible to have two seasons per year," he said.

Photo: Valle y Pampa

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