


As concerns grow about the impact of road transportation costs, Spanish fresh produce consortium Proexport hopes to open discussions with British grocery retailers with a view to developing a new shipping service between northern Spain and the U.K. 

Representatives from the Murcia-based organization, including its president Juan Marín, met with the director of refrigerated transport for European shipping company MacAndrews, Josep Gimeno, last week to discuss ways of establishing a viable service for fresh produce.

Proexport is aiming to put a service in place that will transport fresh fruits and vegetables by train from southeastern Spain to the Port of Bilbao. From there, they will then be shipped to the U.K.

If successful, the organization is hopeful additional maritime services could be added to ports in Scandinavia and Germany.

Speaking to *www.freshfruitportal.com*, Proexport managing director Fernando Gómez said that although discussions were still ongoing with the shipping company, the export consortium was hopeful such a service could ease financial pressure on its member growers.

Gómez said the organization hoped to benefit from MacAndrews' coverage from Bilbao to the U.K. and Northern Europe, as well as potentially taking advantage of a new rail service between Murcia and Bilbao that has been established to transport fresh produce directly to the Spanish port.

"For some time we have been working to improve the transportation of fruits and vegetables produced in the region of Murcia with the aim of reducing logistical costs, maintaining our competitiveness and reducing our carbon dioxide emissions," he said.

"It would also be means of saving on all the taxes and tolls we have to pay at the moment by transporting our goods by road, while also ensuring we are giving the same level of service to our clients."

Gómez said that although discussions with the shipping firm were still in the early stages, transportation by sea, as part of a mix of logistical solutions, should play a part for Proexport.

"We want to have high level discussions with U.K. supermarkets to make this idea a reality," he said.

"The real winner will be the end consumer because they will receive the best quality fresh produce in Europe at reduced costs and with a lower impact on the environment.

"This is important for the sustainability and competitiveness of our companies because we can't continue competing with overseas exporters that do not comply with the labor and social standards that we have in Europe."

Although sea transport would take five days on average to reach U.K. ports instead of three to four days by road, Proexport's managing director said he was confident that 24 hours more would not constitute a huge amount when compared with 20 to 30 days for some overseas exports.

"Although it is still early in the discussions, there is an understanding between Proexport and MacAndrews that we will make this a reality," Gómez added.

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