

At this time of year Poland would normally be readying apple harvests for the Russian market, but with the embargo firmly in place, all hands are on deck to find alternative sales for a huge harvest of fruit. At www.freshfruitportal.com we speak with Union Owocowa (Fruit Union) president Jolanta Kazimierska about how tough times are just around the corner for the sector.

Kazimierska remains optimistic about the search for alternative markets but knows the industry has a huge task ahead with output expected to be in the region of 3.8 million metric tons (MT). 

She says Poland produces a significant portion of Europe's apple crop and usually around one million tons would be en route to Russia.

But this year is very different.

"So far the situation has not been very difficult, if you compare it to previous years - things have not been that dramatic yet but that doesn't mean that it's not going to become more dramatic in about two months time because the apple crop, the one that usually brings in the money, is being harvested just now," Kazimierska tells www.freshfruitportal.com.

"The apples that are being stored in a controlled atmosphere from earlier harvests, these apples are making money. The late summer/early autumn apple is for quick consumption and so goes to the domestic market with a limited amount for export and some for food processing.

"The time to face the biggest losses is just about to come and that could be a real disaster - we are just about to start the harvest and volumes are difficult to forecast right now but we are looking at least 3.8 million tons, at the absolute minimum. So we have quite something to do."

This expectation is higher than [previous forecast](#) of 3.5 million MT signaled by the World Apple and Pear Association (WAPA).

Trying to gain markets in China and the UAE

Work is going on behind the scenes to explore new markets, with a particular focus on large economies and countries that have the potential to absorb significant volumes.

There has been speculation about the possibility of opening new markets in India for instance, but without the proper bilateral agreements in place this could be a long way off.

Instead the focus is firmly on the United Arab Emirates (UAE), with a view of looking at India further down the line.

"Poland produces about four million tons of apples per year and out of that around 1.2 million is exported with up to one million tons that used to be exported to Russia, so having such a strict ban in place, we are forced to look for new markets," Kazimierska says.

"In November we are about to start promotional programs for promoting European apples in China and UAE that we use as a communication platform for all Arabian countries. We opted to place the project in the UAE because of the political situation in countries like Egypt, Libya, Algeria or Morocco where things are not too stable.

"China and India, they are the future. In order to have a direct trade with these countries we have to sign bilateral agreements and governmental agreements on fresh produce exchange which we don't have yet."

She says it could take around one year to get such agreements in place and much preparation works needs to happen because India and China have completely different customer requirements compared with Russia or other European countries.

"We will have time to prepare our production for these markets but with the Arabian countries that is a different story as we are trying to make some trade there, albeit a very limited amount.

"We are now getting in touch with trading companies in those countries and trying to sell what we cannot sell to Russia.

"Because our export was not diversified enough, we now need to undertake all types of actions to ensure this diversification and these are the aims of the whole program; get clients and sell goods."

Feel free to click [here](#) for more stories relating to the Russian ban.

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