

Chinese online retailer Alibaba cashed in on Singles Day hype on Nov. 11 with US\$9.3 billion in sales, up 37% and with double the percentage of customers making orders from their mobile phones.

The improvement was even more pronounced for produce e-commerce player Fruitday, but the phenomenon was not so much a spike as a lift in the overall business over the past 12 months.



Fruitday co-founder Loren Zhao

"Double 11 is not a big day for fresh fruits; a lot of people are buying clothes, shoes, electronics and cosmetics online, but we also see that we've grown three times on last year," Fruitday co-founder Loren Zhao told *www.freshfruitportal.com* during the Produce Marketing Association (PMA) Fruittrade Latin America in Santiago on Wednesday.

"You can buy 10 shoes in one day but you don't want to buy 10 boxes of cherries in one day. Total fresh produce sales on Singles Day account for less than 3% of total sales."

The business is all systems go for a range of upcoming fruit seasons from around the world, as well as new opportunities arising from fresh market openings.

"Tomorrow, Mexico and China are expected to sign the official agreement so that Mexican blackberries and raspberries can enter China," he said, adding that his company would be promoting the fruit once access is confirmed.

"Maybe in two or three weeks the market will officially be open, and after that we'll have to apply for confirmation from the government. When it's ready, we'll be able to ship every week.

"The market maybe does not regard berries from Mexico as very important, because it's a very small share, but for us we think it's a very good product to introduce to China. You can see the trends in Europe, the demand in the United States, and there is huge demand for blackberries."

The entrepreneur added he believed the market for the fruit could potentially be quite good in two to three years, while there were also opportunities for Mexican raspberries despite local competition.

"We have domestic raspberries but I think the taste is different - Mexican raspberries are much sweeter and creamier. Maybe after one season we can review the domestic market for

raspberries."

Zhao also added his team had been speaking with Chilean avocado suppliers to make the most of their new access for the Chinese market.

"I think in the short-term we will have Chilean avocados in China," he said, adding that middle class consumers had been successfully educated about the fruit after years of avocado supply from Mexico.

Also from Chile, Fruitday is expecting higher cherry exports from the South American country this coming season.

"We will cooperate with ProChile, ASOEX and the committee here, not only for sales but to help the brand image in Chinese market, in the same way we have cooperated with Northwest Cherries in the United States," Zhao said.

The company will continue to target high-end consumers with cherry supplies from New Zealand and Australia, but while mainland Australian suppliers have registered to supply China using cold treatment, Fruitday will stick to Tasmania for the time being.

"My explanation is that maybe in mainland Australia they want to get allowed directly into China and they don't want to lose the opportunity, so maybe they don't want to do it with cold treatment, but they want to show the Chinese government that they are able export to China.

"Around two years ago I think we were the first to have Tasmanian cherries in China. Of course we are very excited and this year we want to do more Tasmanian cherries, as well as Chilean and New Zealand cherries."

Elsewhere in Oceania, he said trials for Tasmanian apples and New Zealand Honey Belle pears went well this year, and Fruitday planned to increase volumes of both these products in 2015.

"The first year is very difficult because you have to test the waters and get feedback, but next year will be easier because customers already know about the fruit," Zhao said.

"On the internet they can broadcast from customer to customer, and through the power of the mouse they can spread it to each other. The future will be very bright."

The executive was also positive about Californian citrus and Washington apples regaining

access to the Chinese market.

"We're very excited about the Washington apples. I spoke with the Washington Apple Commission during the PMA Fresh Summit and we have a plan to work to get apples back to China again.

"Maybe this year at first it will just be Red Delicious and Golden Delicious as the only varieties, but we wish that next year we can have more varieties coming from Washington State to China.

"We want to do something to support Californian citrus and Sunkist because we have cooperated for a long time, and we are very sorry that we missed them for the last two seasons."

Zhao said his company imported the first container of Californian citrus to China after the reopening, catching the end of the Valencian orange season with an arrival two weeks ago.

However, to offset the effects of the ban on Californian citrus, the Chinese market was opened up to other sources which may not go away now that the dominant player is back on the scene.

"I think the orange from Spain, Egypt and Cyprus will be very important for supplying the Chinese market," Zhao said.

"We are very happy that the U.S. citrus has come back to China again, but I think that since the Egyptian and Spanish oranges have been in China, they will continue to be there for the future. I think this is the trend; they will not leave now that the U.S. is back in.

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