

When it comes to new blueberry plantings in South America much of the attention goes to Peru, but a Chilean nursery is also capitalizing on opportunities in another tropical nation nearby. The fruit is less well-known in Brazil but Viveros Sunnyridge Chile's Jorge Nanjari said the consumer base had exceeded his expectations, in a business that was originally focused on exporters to Europe.

Harnessing varieties bred from the University of Florida that don't have the cold hour requirements of more traditional blueberries, Viveros Sunnyridge is finding new horizons from its Brazilian base outside the southern agricultural hub of Campinas. 

The company first expanded into Brazil in 2010 with a nursery in Holambra, and it now supplies growers across 80-100 hectares in the country with half in the state of Sao Paulo and the remainder in the north-central state of Petrolina.

"There are two harvests a year for our varieties, with the main one in August-September and another in March," he told www.freshfruitportal.com during the Produce Marketing Association (PMA) Fruittrade Latin America in Santiago last week.

"Brazil is a spectacular market - there are 80 million habitants between Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Belo Horizonte, with an area of 200km around these three cities which is an agricultural zone that just supplies the local market.

"I had not thought about the domestic market in Brazil until I saw it."

He said around 10-15% of Brazilians had incomes that were high enough to afford the antioxidant-rich fruit, which led to very attractive returns for growers.

"These people have international tastes, they know blueberries because they've tasted them in their travels, on vacations, or because they read a lot," Nanjari said.

"These people are willing to pay a high price for blueberries, and with the value of the fruit that I've seen when I've been to visit supermarkets in Brazil, there's a very attractive return that Chilean blueberry exporters have also seen."

Despite the strong local focus for farmers in the southern belt, the executive said growers in the north were often more focused on shipping to Europe.

"The advantage is that they have a lot more airlines than what we have in Chile, seafreight takes five days less and the freight rates are much lower, so you can make a good business from it.

"In Brazil the experience is that plants get established within 1.5 years. It's very similar to the experience we've had in Peru."

He said the challenge for the nursery in Brazil was attracting the attention of growers who have such a plethora of fruit types to choose from.

"Producers have more than 80 fruit varieties they could grow and it's difficult to choose; many of those fruits are only known in Brazil.

"Blueberries are not that well-known. Introducing a new variety to a country takes time, it takes years, and it's very logical that growers want to see the return that can be seen in the wholesale market.

"But the result has been very good - it's not a market that's moving at the speed of Peru, but it has a slow and sustained growth," Nanjari said, adding that most clients in Brazil were family farmers with small landholdings.

He said the most common varieties Viveros Sunnyridge Chile sold in Brazil were Emerald and Snowchaser, which were appropriate for the country's growing conditions.

"Principally, they are varieties that are evergreen and have two harvests when there is no presence of cold.

"The soils in Brazil are naturally acidic, which is very good because you don't have to acidify. The plants are very productive and have worked well because they grow precociously."

In terms of Peru, the executive said his plant export program there was very aggressive.

"We have very good clients in Peru, and about seven or eight containers with plants exported to Peru over the last year," he said.

"And they have been well placed, and I think they will be a very good complement to Chilean production," he said, also mentioning there was opportunity for new varieties in Peru in a sector dominated by the Biloxi variety.

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