

New Zealand kiwifruit marketer Zespri is investigating the possibility of partnering with Chinese growers, in a bid to shore up year-round supply for what may become its biggest market in the coming years. 

The group's corporate relations manager for China, Matt Crawford, told www.freshfruitportal.com that scoping for the idea was still in its early stages.

"There's huge growth in domestic production here in China and we've started to see some big players getting involved. For Joyvio for example, this year the number is above 6,000 (metric) tons (MT)," he said.

"The question Zespri is asking itself now is, is there potential for us to look at growing or partnering in China? What we've been doing is looking around the regions that grow kiwifruit and trying to see who's growing, what the variety is, how much is being grown what the cost is.

"The next step for us is having that conversation back in New Zealand - is it the right time? Do we think we can partner with companies or growers that will allow us to grow really high quality kiwifruit? Because at the end of the day, the worst thing we could do would be to damage our brand by growing fruit that wasn't up to the Zespri standard."

This cautious approach to standards is one that Zespri has also taken for its growing partnerships in Northern Hemisphere countries like Italy, France, Japan and South Korea.


Photo: Yeecheng Chua, via Facebook

"Zespri doesn't own any orchards around the world but we own our plant varieties so they can grow our fruit; we purchase from them and sell it on their behalf," Crawford said.

"It's probably the best way to do it in China particularly as we can't buy land and it's hard to aggregate land. We've seen some really big commercial blocks out there that are doing large scale production.

"One of the best things for us to do is to be able to bring our technology and growing systems to help with local farmers, and that's gonna add more money to the local communities so there's this side as well where there are real benefits."

He added that China would also be a great market for a red kiwifruit variety Zespri was trialling in Singapore, but next year would still be too soon.

"When we develop a new variety the key is to make sure it's going to be perfect for the market, that we know it tastes great and that the consumers really like it," he said.

"Growers must be able to grow it easily, it needs to be able to have good yields, and it needs to be able to last in the market as well because our shipping time from New Zealand is up to four weeks to China.

"It doesn't have a name yet as it's not officially commercialized. For Singapore we had pre-commercial trials...we hope that we can get it right so that in the next couple of years we can start to see it commercialized and have New Zealand growers planting and cutting across to red."

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