

The Brazilian apple industry may not be expecting an increase in volumes any time soon, but the sector is none the less seeking out new varieties and a range of new markets to trade with. 

Speaking to *www.freshfruitportal.com* at last weeks' PMA Fresh Connections: Brazil in Sao Paulo, Brazilian Apple Growers' Association (ABPM) executive director Moisés Lopes de Albuquerque said he anticipated the country's annual production of some 1.2 million metric tons (MT) to stay flat over the coming years.

"I don't foresee an increase in production volumes, but I think the quality will improve," he said.

"We need to increase our competitiveness, and the way to do that will be through improving quality. We're mainly focused on the domestic market, and that is growing rapidly."

He added that last year only about 3-4% of total production was shipped abroad.

The apple industry is relatively new in Brazil - compared to other countries - having only properly got off the ground in the 1970s. This was largely due to limiting factors for apple production like the hot climate.

The climate has also limited the number of varieties that can be grown in the Portuguese-speaking country, with Gala and Fuji representing almost all the production, and some small volumes of Pink Lady.

Lopes said the industry was currently searching for 'one or two' new varieties that could be fully adapted to the climate.

"The climate is one key reason a lot of varieties cannot adapt to here," he said.

"We need to work to be able to introduce new varieties. Brazilians love red and sweet apples, so that would be important, but above all they need to be varieties that are very resistant to diseases. That aspect is critical."

Lopes said the country's apple exporters would love to increase their trade with Europe, but he said it's been hard in recent months with a large supply on the continent, exacerbated by the Russian import embargo.

"We are also looking to open several markets slightly closer to home, like Colombia - that looks like a very interesting market and we would love to gain access," he said.

"We're also looking at Ecuador, Peru and Cuba. Mexico looks very interesting too, but it's hard to gain access. In addition there are a number of Asian markets like India, Indonesia, Bangladesh, and the Philippines."

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