

Various cherry varieties are set to be tested in different areas of Peru's mountainous region and trials could be completed in four years' time, according to a representative of government organization Sierra y Selva Exportadora.



Peru has been looking to introduce cherries into its fruit basket for a while, and the interest led a major nursery to import some plant material in 2015 for feasibility studies.

Last year the head of Los Viñedos said **"everyone" was requesting plants.**

Also addressing this interest, Sierra y Selva Exportadora has been assessing which areas of the country's mountainous region could be suitable to produce the crop.

Peru can largely be divided into three geographical areas - the coast, the sierra and the jungle.

Speaking with *Fresh Fruit Portal*, Vicente Zegarra Suarez, head of the entity's National Program of Hass Avocado and Other Fruit Trees, explained the first batch of rootstocks had already arrived in the country.

"A year ago the Colt and Maxma 14 rootstocks arrived, and there are 800 plants whose behaviour we will evaluate with the varieties Mini Royal, Royal Dawn, Royal Lee and Lapins," he said.

Zegarra said the testing process could take at least four years, as the researchers would need to match the varieties with the specific areas of the sierra.

"We know that cherries need 800 cold hours on average, and our idea is to introduce them in the ravines or Interandean vallies, which is where there the fruit will receive enough cold hours," he said.

"The Mini Royal and Royal Dawn varieties have low requirements of cold hours and we also want to try varieties with higher requirements like Brooks or Bing."

There are a few areas with suitable conditions for cherry production under consideration, including the northern mountainous area of Cajamarca, the Mantaro Valley in the central department of Junin, and the valleys around Cuzco in the south.

"We expect to begin production trials halfway through this year, mixing the rootstocks with various different varieties in these areas. This is work that will involve the private sector, the municipalities and the growers."

The representative said there had already been some indications of how cherries grow in Peru, thanks to some small orchards in the sierra region that have been around since the colonial period.

"We have seen the cherry trees produce fruit between the months of November and December, which could give us a commercial advantage against countries like Chile and Argentina," he said.

"But we also know that during these months there is risk of rain and hail, and so we are compiling all the information we can in order to protect the orchards with plastic covers, which we know have provided good results in countries like Chile.

"By using covers we will be forced to use the dwarfing rootstocks like Maxma 14, because otherwise it would be complicated."

Overall Zegarra says there is a promising future for cherries in Peru, believing that producing low-chill varieties could easily be developed in the mountains.

In terms of potential export markets, he said cherries would likely be shipped to similar destinations as other major fruit crops like avocados, blueberries and table grapes.

"We would start with Europe, then the U.S. and then finally get to China, where we know that there are the largest importers of this fruit and a very attractive market for prices," he said.

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