

The Polish Berry Cooperative, an organization comprising the three producer groups, is upbeat for strong production with good quality and size this year, after blueberries survived last week's frost relatively unscathed. Sales director Agata Malkiewicz Speaks with Fresh Fruit Portal.

“We are quite optimistic, the upcoming season is looking very good and we are hoping to reach the 3,000 tonne mark within the Polish Berry Cooperative,” she says.



“For several years we have been consistently investing in frost protection infrastructure, such as tunnels, wind mills, overhead sprinklers and fogging machines. Our main strategy is always prevention, that is why we have minimal frost damage this year - we are very happy about that.

“Right now we expect to begin our harvest at the end of the second week of July, but of course everything depends on the weather. Compared to last year this will be a later start, but only because last season started very early, due to warm weather.”

Some areas of Poland were hit by unseasonably low temperatures and frost recently as part of a cold spell across much of Europe which also hit regions in Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Austria, Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands.

A prolonged hard frost in Belgium's major fruit-growing region of Flanders recently had a devastating effect on crops.

“Our main challenge is the weather - the most difficult obstacles are the ones you cannot control. Every year surprises us with a new challenge; last year we experienced heavy frosts

and then conditions that accelerated the season,” adds Malkiewicz.

“This year has thankfully been quite mild, also because every year we are better equipped with machinery, new infrastructure and more knowledge, which helps immensely in coping with unexpected weather events.”

Forecasts for a solid harvest remain intact for Polish blueberries, buoyed by a specific picking technique that improves freshness and quality, explains Malkiewicz.

“We expect to have both very good quality and very good size fruit, mainly due to our field management and picking strategy. We prune quite heavily to improve both quality and size.

“Within Polish Berry Cooperative we have developed and implemented the “30 minutes” standard, which means that we lock in the freshness and flavour of our fruit by pre-cooling it within 30 minutes from picking.

“We also introduced the “7 Rules of Good Harvest”, which are instrumental in the training of pickers and raising even further the quality and shelf life of our fruit.”

Diversifying blueberries sales is a key component of this year’s export campaign as the Cooperative builds on opportunities in key Asian markets as well as the U.K., its main importer.

“Even though the UK has always been and will remain our key market this year, we are focused on diversifying our sales, we are very excited about new opportunities in Asia. We have been present on the Asian market for the last three years, and we will soon be expanding our reach in the region.

“Our focus will continue to be consolidation of blueberry production in Poland in order to be able to provide consistent deliveries of fruit produced in accordance with the highest quality standards.

“We are currently working on an R&D initiative in Poland and hopefully soon we will be able to share more details about that.”

Polish Berry Cooperative is also involved in the “National Polish Blueberry Day” campaign, which highlights the beginning of the Polish blueberry season and spreads awareness of health benefits of blueberries among Polish consumers.

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