

The developers of pioneering technology that customers can use to slice a pineapple of their choice and take it home in a plastic tub are expecting exponential growth over the next couple of years.

Speaking to *Fresh Fruit Portal* at last week's London Produce Show and Conference, Dutch Food Technology sales manager Michel van Keeken said the number of machines in operation around the world was set to quadruple by the end of 2020.

Customers place a pineapple in the machine, which then picks it up, removes all the skin and the core, cuts it into slices and returns it to the customer in a plastic tub within a matter of seconds.



Dutch Food Technology sales manager Michel van Keeken

The idea for the machine, named Piñabar, came about in 2013 years ago when the company was approached by a retailer that asked if they could develop such technology.

Van Keeken said the company launched its first product in 2015 in Dutch and German supermarkets.

"We have been picked up by retailers like Carrefour in Spain and Edeka in Germany, which introduced it inside of their franchises and we grew very fast...now we have machines in places including Scandinavia, Southern Europe, Australia, New Zealand and the U.S."

Edeka has an exclusivity agreement with Dutch Food Technology to use the machine in Germany, and a similar deal has been made with U.S. pineapple company Chestnut Hill Farms, which will sell fruit along with the machine to its clients.

There have been huge increases in pineapple sales in stores that have installed a machine, he said.

"From the start, especially in certain countries like Spain and Germany, the increase in sales was somewhere between two to six times the original sales," he said.

"If you take away the hassle of cutting it yourself, you have a real seller on your hands. That is something that the machine made possible."

He said around 250 machines were now being used in roughly 20 countries at present, anticipating there would be a total of 500 machines in operation in 12 months' time and more than 1,000 in two years.

"It's definitely something that's exploding," he said.

The first sales have recently been made in the Chinese market, with the machines due to be delivered by the end of July. Van Keeken expected huge growth in that market as well.

Dutch Food Technology recently opened a sales office in the U.S., where retailers including Whole Foods and Walmart have used Piñabars.

Production of the machines is still based solely in the Netherlands but Van Keeken said the company was looking into expanding elsewhere.

Van Keeken also said the company was not confined to just pineapples, and was looking at "different fresh experiences" for other foods.

"We have some ideas now for our current machines, such as small ones...but we see a trend toward 'fresh but fast'. It has to be convenient. So that's something we want to pick up on," he said.

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