



The Chilean blueberry season kicked off in October, and expectations are for a slight year-on-year drop in exports to 105,000 metric tons (MT), down from 110,000MT.

This year there are expected to be strong conditions in the global frozen market, and around 40,000MT of fruit are also expected to be sold for that sector during the 2018-19 season.

“It’s forecast that there’ll be better prices for frozen fruit, which facilitates the derivation of fruit to the frozen market - fruit that doesn’t have good enough condition and quality to go out to the fresh market,” said Andrés Armstrong, president of the Chilean Blueberry Committee.

He added that the industry was able to achieve record volumes last year in part because only a very small proportion of fruit did not meet export quality standards due to weather-related issues.

On Monday this year, a hailstorm impacted Chile's central and southern regions, with cherries and stonefruit among the most heavily affected. Fedefruta president Jorge Valenzuela said that it seemed some plantations had been affected in the Maule and Ñuble regions.

Armstrong said that the adverse weather event could have an impact on production as it affected a wide area.

The fresh blueberry season for this campaign should go until April 2019, with an expected delay of the bigger shipments to later in November.

The market distribution is expected to remain similar to last year when 64% of fruit went to North America, 25% went to Europe and almost 11% to Asia, which has been the fastest-

growing market.

“Several countries have started to increase consumption,” said Armstrong. “In Asia, our main importer is China, followed by South Korea, and then Taiwan and Japan, which are at the same level”.

Despite that, he says that they have lots of space to grow, which is why they are working actively in promotion strategies, focusing on Poland for the first time this year.

“Poland is a country that produces in their season, which is in counter-season to ours. That means that is a consumer that already knows the product and that has an economic situation that has been improving, with greater purchasing power,” he said.

Russia is also starting to pick up for the Chilean fresh blueberries.

Consumer trends

Armstrong said the Chilean blueberry industry did a survey in China last year and found that the two critical aspects for consumers were sweetness and taste, along with size.

“Today several exporters have packaging machines that select calibers very efficiently, basically to reach segments of the Chinese market where they pay a premium for big sizes,” he said, explaining that the fruit is very delicate and must be evaluated with the eye rather than touch.

In that sense, packaging has become a crucial point for the selling of blueberries, as different clamshells have had to be developed for the various markets.

In China, Chilean blueberries usually come in clamshells of 125 grams, while in the U.S. the standard is 300 grams, although there are times when one could find 175 gram packages.

In Europe, the average usually is between 175-200 grams, but it depends on the market.

“One would think that having lots of choices would suit the consumer, but for them is sometimes complicated because is harder to see when there is a good supply,” Armstrong said.

For the Chilean blueberry industry, much of the industry's efforts are focused on ensuring high and consistent quality, said Armstrong.

“Our fruit has a very good taste, good sweetness, but the quality is quite homogenous during the season, despite all the different varieties and the different weathers that Chilean producers face.”

“We have climatic diversity, so there is a heterogeneous condition that we should advance. Especially as supplies from other countries that have more genetic material and newer varieties are starting to appear.”