

Peru is expecting to increase its fresh fruit and vegetable exports by at least a fifth in 2019, after a strong start to the year that saw a 9% uptick in shipments.

Exports rose to US\$662 million in January and February this year, with fruit contributing US\$600 million, up 10% year-on-year, according to Peru's Agricultural Association of Producer Unions (AGAP).

Gabriel Amaro, AGAP's executive director, told FreshFruitPortal.com that the rise was due to the absence of adverse weather issues that can affect production.

"Last year we grew by 22% in fruits and vegetables, and this year we hope to achieve an increase of around 20% or more," he said.

"Blueberries are going to continue growing at a very fast rate, and we've also had strong growth for grapes and avocados."

Grapes were the leading fruit export over the first two months, fetching US\$343 million. The fruit's main market was the US with 47%, followed by Hong Kong with 14%, the Netherlands and China with 9% each, and Mexico with 5%.

Blueberry exports totaled US\$77 million, with the US receiving 72% followed by the Netherlands with 12% and the UK with 10%.

In addition, mangoes registered exports of US\$123 million during the first two months of the year.

A stand-out of the period was fresh pomegranates, with exports nearly tripling from US\$6 million last year to US\$15 million this year.

"Pomegranates are a new product that are growing and winning an increasing amount of space. We export the fresh fruit and the arils, and we are also working on opening new markets," Amaro said. The Chinese market is expected to open for fresh pomegranates this year.