

Argentina is expecting to send its first-ever lemon exports to the Indian market next year, having recently gained access.

Export protocols were signed by the Argentine Minister of Agroindustry, Luis Miguel Etchevehere, during a trade mission, opening up a rapidly growing lemon market to the world's biggest exporter.

"Argentina is the world's leading lemon exporter, [and lemons] are an important part of the regional economy in the Northwest of the country," he said.

"The opening of the market will have a big impact on exports and employment in this region."

Jose Carbonell, president of industry body Federcitrus, told FreshFruitPortal.com: "We are very interested in very large markets like India."

"It has opened with an accessible, compliant and adequate phytosanitary protocol, but we still have a significant import tariff," he said.

Carbonell expects the first lemon exports to take place next season, and said that Argentina will have to work hard to gain a foothold in the market.

"India isn't a country that has a tradition of mass lemon consumption, but around the world lemons ... are beginning to be used in different geographies and for different uses with food," he said.

Indian consumers would be much more accustomed with a lime variety similar to the Tahiti lime, he said. But he added that the younger generations are increasingly using more Mediterranean ingredients in their food, such as olive oil, garlic and lemon.

The new brand "Frutas de Argentina" that was **recently launched** will assist in promoting Argentine lemons in the Indian market.

"It is a way of resolving competition issues that we have experienced between the different fruit sectors in Argentina, and of unifying all the country's fruit under one brand," he said.

Aside from India, Carbonella noted that lemon exports to the U.S. - which are in their second season after the near-two-decade hiatus - will likely see lower volumes than initially forecasted. Last year they reached a little over 10,000 metric tons (MT).

"There is still some of the season left, but it is foreseeable that we will get to that figure again," he said.

He said that exports to most markets including Europe are lower this year due to low prices.

Total Argentine lemon exports reached 280,000MT last year. To date this season they have reached 190,000MT and are expected to run through August.