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A troubling economic scenario in China this year has greatly affected the market for Chilean cherries at the start of the season, importers say.

China's economic growth is expected to hit a near 30-year low of 6.2% this year and reduce further in 2020. The importers say the situation that has dented consumers' willingness to buy high-end imported fruits.

Liu Wenpo, chairman of Beijing Runfuyuan Commercial and Trade Co., told FreshFruitPortal.com that the social unrest in Chile over recent weeks has had very little effect on the market.

His comments come amid expectations of a 16.7% rise in Chilean cherry exports this season to a record 210,000MT.

However, the negative economic environment has taken its toll. Domestic sales in China are not keeping up pace with the expected volumes, he said.

Liu Wenpo said that cherry prices are around 20% lower year-on-year, even before the heavier volumes of Chilean cherries have arrived.

He added that demand for freshness and taste continues to grow, creating additional challenges for Chilean cherries in the Chinese market.

Cherry quality good but prices could fall further in Chinese market

Meanwhile, Han Jiangang, head of the fruit procurement business of Chen's Sunshine Fruit and Vegetable Trading Co., has expressed similar views.

He said that the unrest in Chile had little impact on cherry exports to China and the purchase price has not changed much this year.

But as a result of weakening domestic consumption, the Chinese market price has dropped significantly, he explained. This means that the profits have shrunk and the risk of operating cherries has increased, he said.

Han Jiangang said that the quality of Chilean cherries is good this year. But as more cherries arrive, there will undoubtedly be pressure on sales, he said.

The first ships from Chile departed on Nov. 13 and are expected to arrive in Hong Kong on Dec. 6, and Shanghai on Dec. 9, according to the representative. He expected arrivals would concentrate between weeks 52 and 2.