

The Philippines has formally opened its market to fresh U.S. blueberries, making the North American country the only supplier with official access.

The development comes on the heels of China also granting imports of U.S. fresh blueberries, expanding its previous access that was limited to fried and frozen fruit.

The North American Blueberry Council (NABC) said that the U.S. has been providing fresh highbush blueberries to the Philippine market, but only in an intermittent capacity, with sales limited to hotels, restaurants and high-end supermarkets.

With official access to this vibrant market, the sales growth potential is "significant", it says.

The USDA reports that annual U.S. sales have averaged US\$150,000 over the last five years, but trade experts project that sales could reach US\$500,000 this season, and as much as US\$1 million annually in the future.

Massive China tariff needs to be addressed

Meanwhile, the NABC says China's updated trade agreement serves as a "symbol of positive momentum" in trade relations between the two countries, and the potential the Chinese market holds for the U.S. highbush blueberry industry.

It adds that more work remains to be done, including addressing the 75% tariff imposed on blueberries exported from the U.S.

"The NABC has been working diligently for many months to ensure this opportunity would open up for U.S. blueberry growers," said Alicia Adler, vice president of NABC, who's charged with overseeing the NABC's market access efforts and the U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council's (USHBC) global programs.

"This significant milestone could not have been achieved without close collaboration between the U.S. government agricultural negotiators, key industry stakeholders from all growing regions and a team of technical export advisers at Bryant Christie Inc."

David Arena, chair of the USHBC Export Committee and president of Frank Donio Inc, says there is "significant growth potential" for the U.S. in China.

"Opening the Chinese market for fresh blueberries will help grow demand, ultimately supporting USHBC's strategic goal of doubling exports by 2025, with a focus on high-

opportunity markets in North and Southeast Asia," he says.

Elizabeth Carranza, the California Blueberry Commission's director of trade & technical affairs, says the state's industry is very much looking forward to the opportunities that exist for blueberries in China.

"Although there has been an agreement for market access, we are still faced with the challenge of a 75% tariff for blueberries in the market," she says.

"However, Chinese consumers also are demonstrating clear interest in blueberries specifically. From 2014 to 2018, the volume of per capita fresh blueberry consumption in China increased by more than 400%."

China export protocol

The requirements for fresh U.S. blueberries being shipped to China are as follows:

- Fresh blueberries must be commercially produced from the states of California, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Louisiana, Michigan, Mississippi, New Jersey, North Carolina, Oregon and Washington.
- Blueberries must come from packing houses registered and approved by USDA, and the registered packing houses must have a system to ensure all fruit can be traced back to the supplying orchards.
- Each packing house must retain a list of registered supplying orchards that can be made available at the request of the USDA or GACC, the agency in China that corresponds with the USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS).

APHIS will supply the list of approved packing houses to GACC annually.