

With the Argentine blueberry export harvests due to kick off in August, the industry is concerned about the potential shortage of air freight capacity.

The Argentine Government has canceled all commercial flights until Sept. 1, which could cause problems for the early fruit.

"Last year in August, Argentina shipped 50% of production via air freight and 50% by sea freight," Argentine Blueberry Committee president Federico Baya told FreshFruitPortal.com.

"That 50% that is sent by air freight is what will likely be affected by the measures."

Baya and Alejandro Pannunzio of the Mesopotamia industry body are in talks with national airline Aerolineas Argentinas to try and secure flights for the season's initial exports and guarantee the flow of the fruit to overseas markets.

"We're sure that we're going to have their collaboration to be able to supply destinations that are demanding our fruit."

Argentina typically exports around 16,000 metric tons (MT) of blueberries, with almost all going to the U.S., the U.K. and Europe. Harvests for the local market begin in June.

Although Argentina's blueberry industry is concerned over logistical aspects of the upcoming season, something that it's pleased about is the demand spike for fruits around the world, and especially blueberries.

"Blueberries are being revitalized especially in the U.S., a country with more than 300 million people and an average annual consumption of 800 grams per person," Baya said.

Pannunzio added that consumption is also rising in Europe.

"So the market is definitely there. The question is how much consumers will be willing to pay is the big question," he said.

The representatives added that Argentina blueberry companies have implemented new protocols to protect workers amid the Covid-19 pandemic.