

Ethiopian avocados have been successfully exported to Europe by a Belgian-based company, amid expectations of huge fresh produce export potential for the East African country.

Durabilis - an international impact investment company, and the owner of fresh produce importer FairFruit in Belgium - said the arrival of trial Hass avocados is a game-changing milestone.

Thanks to the new Ethiopia-Djibouti-Europe cool logistics corridor via train-sea-truck, the consignment presents buyers across the UK and Europe with a new window of availability for competitively-priced Hass avocados from mid-September to mid-October. It paves the way for a whole new range of produce exports from Ethiopia.

The first container arrived in the UK on Sept. 20 followed by a second shipment on Oct. 5. The vast majority of the GlobalGAP-certified fruit has been sold to two leading importers who mainly serve UK retailers.

Trial volumes have been offered to customers in Belgium and the Netherlands also. Separately, two trial airfreight shipments have been received positively in the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia.

Evert Wulfrank, CEO of Durabilis, explains: "Considering the agricultural potential of Ethiopia, this successful test with avocados creates a whole new perspective for a series of Ethiopian products that qualify for export to Europe.

The 750km refrigerated railway connection from Modjo Dry Port in Ethiopia to the Port of Djibouti means exporting Ethiopian produce by seafreight has become a real option.

"The train offers a regular, reliable service lasting 30 hours, compared with two-to-three days by truck. Overall, the transit time from Ethiopia to Europe is now less than 30 days approximately, and there is the potential to reduce that to 24 days in the future."

He added that this is important for buyers that are looking for new and competitive sources of fresh fruits and vegetables, and who, so far, have disregarded Ethiopia as a feasible option because the country lacked seafreight connections.

"We are looking for more avocado buyers in the UK, Europe and the Middle East because our projected production volumes will grow substantially and we will have a range of sizes," he said.

Ethiopia has considerable agricultural potential thanks to its fertile soils, a temperate

climate, competitive labor costs, and plenty of available water within the Koga region (south of Bahir Dar) where Durabilis is working with smallholder growers in conjunction with its local subsidiary Koga Veg Agricultural Development.

Jan Michielsen, General Manager of Koga Veg in Ethiopia (owned by Durabilis), said “At this stage, our primary focus is to establish a commercially-viable business model; sourcing from smallholder avocado growers and supplying their fruit to the international market via a reliable logistics link.

“Already, those growers have adopted environmentally-friendly production methods that meet the quality requirements for the ready-to-eat sector in Europe, for which they receive a fair price. In the future, we’d like to invest further in more sustainable methods, efficient water usage, and, ultimately, in organic-certified production.”