

An industry leader broke down the new patterns of production and sales in the U.S. during the pandemic in the first webinar of a new series sponsored by Chile's [Fedefruta](#).

With over 400 attendees, the conversation named "Changes caused by the pandemic in the sale of fresh fruit in the U.S." was led by Zak Laffite, the president of Wonderful Citrus and a member of the United Fresh Produce Association Board of Directors.

The discussion covered changes in sales, logistics and technology in the context of U.S. retail during the pandemic, and its impact on the fruit market.

"Some of these trends came before Covid-19 and have been accelerated due to the pandemic," Laffite started by saying, and that "it is the fastest we have seen changes in the retail market", reaching very high levels of competitiveness, since the consumer is altering the way they buy produce.

Increased consumption of fruits and vegetables in the U.S.

Laffite identified three main driving forces that are changing in the U.S. market as technology, demographic and generational changes and the health crisis due to the pandemic.

"Over the last year, fruit consumption has increased by 9 percent, and in the first months of the pandemic it reached 12 to 13 percent", he said. It is also important to see what is happening within vegetables, where they are at 14 to 15 percent, due to the trend of being health-conscious.

Logistical impact

He commented that logistics and transportation are the most complex issues for exporting producers in these times of pandemic as maritime and land freight, as well as pallet prices, have been affected.

"In some cases, they are seeing the highest cost of ocean freight in the last 45 years. In the case of land freight, they are seeing exactly the same thing: an increase in cost," Laffite said.

He added that there has also been a reduction of workers in this sector and a 280 percent increase in the scarcity of wood, which makes several points in this chain difficult.

Trends: digital and sustainable

The second part of the discussion focused on current trends and opportunities. Firstly, the use of e-commerce has been increasing, since 54 percent of consumers bought fruits online during the pandemic, and it is anticipated that 93 percent of this group will continue to buy online after the pandemic.

Regarding this trend, Laffite pointed out that there are three factors that directly affect producers: packaged fruit, that e-commerce reduces impulsive purchases and changes in promotions and investments in supermarkets.

The second trend addressed the new generations and demographic changes, which entail changes in the uses of technology, shopping habits, consumption and diet.

In closing, Laffite said that social networks and digital platforms are tools of opportunity of a direct link with the consumer as they all have different features and options.