

New Zealand kiwifruit exporter Zespri has said that shipments to China will continue as normal after some of its fruit tested positive for Covid-19 in the country last week.

On Friday, Zespri said it had launched “emergency management plans” after a batch of its fruit tested positive for the virus and stocks were pulled from some Chinese supermarket shelves.

In a statement on Monday, Zespri CEO Dan Mathieson confirmed it was Zespri fruit exported last month which tested positive, and all subsequent tests had come back negative.

“We continue to work constructively with authorities following the test result,” said Mathieson. “This remains the only positive test on our kiwifruit, with all subsequent (and previous) COVID-19 tests proving negative.”

“We are continuing to supply our fruit into China as normal. All shipments into China have been processed in accordance with standard protocols, including testing for COVID-19 and disinfecting to provide additional certainty. This is the same process all previous imports to China have followed.”

He said Zespri expects “some short-term impact” but is encouraged by the the response from Chinese consumers who continue to show trust in its fruit.

On Friday Zespri said it had recently learned that the Market Supervision Authority and the Center for Disease Control (CDC) in Yaohai District Hefei City Anhui Province conducted routine Covid-19 testing of fruit in the wholesale market and a sample of its kiwifruit tested positive.

The affected fruit from the Bay of Plenty was packed in May before being shipped from Tauranga on August 16. There remains no reported community transmission in the region.

The fruit was tested for Covid-19 upon arrival in China by China Customs and Zespri, as well as being disinfected, as per standard China Customs protocols, Zespri said.

“Since the beginning of the coronavirus epidemic, we have worked strictly in accordance with the requirements of the relevant national regulatory authorities and have cooperated with all the epidemic prevention and eradication work programmes for imported fruit and market distribution, to ensure that only the freshest, safest, high-quality Zespri Kiwifruit reaches our consumers,” Mathieson said.

Zespri's response praised

Lincoln University director of agribusiness and food marketing Nic Lees said Chinese authorities were actively looking for every possible Covid-19 pathway, so such detections are not uncommon there, according to [Radio New Zealand](#).

He said there was unlikely to be a high level of awareness of this detection in China.

"I think what we're seeing is that Chinese authorities are being very strict in terms of how they look at all possible sources of how Covid might get into the country."

Lees said Zespri had a valuable brand in China, particularly around food safety, and the company had done the right thing by acting quickly and taking the situation seriously.

"Even though, you know, this may not pose a particular risk, I think, you know, acting quickly, showing you're being responsible... you're likely to get more government support in that situation."