



By John Giles, Divisional Director, [Promar International](#)

Now back from Berlin for a few days, it is time to start sifting through the numerous business cards collected over the three days and think about what needs to be followed up on, with who and when.

From the Wednesday through to Friday, we held almost 30 meetings and met clients, friends and colleagues from across the world, including the UK (it always strikes me as somewhat odd that you go all the way to Berlin to meet people who live and work less than 100 miles away from you in the UK!), the US, Chile, Peru, NZ, SA, Australia, France, Mexico, Colombia, Germany and Brazil.

This really is an international event and where the world does come together as one. I have been attending for 30 years now - I can't believe it!

It's also the time to reflect on what we heard, saw and discussed with clients over the 3 days and put them in to some sort of wider context. Among the most important and common things we spent thinking about over the time in Berlin were:

The issue of sustainability will be one that is not going to go away.

Indeed, it will only increase in importance, but many in the supply chain still struggle to define what it really means and how to tackle this issue, not least coming to grips with the task of independent verification.

Anyone can claim to be “sustainable” (and most do), but the use of robust and independent data to back this up is critical.

Ambitious targets to reach equally ambitious objectives of carbon neutral supply chains by 2030, 2035 and 2040 (take your pick on a target date) are all not that far off now. More work needs to be carried out in these areas, if we are to have any chance of meeting them.

The growth of the Peruvian fresh produce sector

Production and exports are booming. The country seems to have really got “the bit between its teeth” for a whole range of crops, including tropical fruit, grapes and berries - and this for a country that was known for many years mainly as the world champion of asparagus. Yes, there are issues with water and labour, as well as the civil unrest seen in the country in the last few months. Peru, however, is of course not the only country that is experiencing these problems/challenges. There is a combination of factors that explain the success of the Peruvian horticultural sector, but not least the country’s ability to negotiate trade deals with a whole host of emerging markets, not least in Asia.

Problems associated with logistics in a post COVID era

Shipping and containers costs have started to come down in recent months, but are still at high levels compared to what might be thought of as the pre COVID “norm”. Disruption to shipping and logistics seems set to carry on for some time to come.

This can make planning ahead for exports to long distance markets much more difficult

The use of hort tech products and services

This is a very wide ranging subject, including vertical farming systems, climate change mitigation technology, robotics and automation, precision based irrigation systems, reducing pesticide usage, post harvest treatments, crop breeding and varietal developments, food waste etc.

Money from a range of investors seems to be pouring into this sector like it is going out of fashion. It seems to us, though, that only the best thought through projects will be successful and many will eventually fall by the wayside

The attraction for many of SE Asian markets

The SE Asian region, while hit hard by the impact of COVID seems to be in a stronger

recovery mode than the UK/EU, where the adverse macroeconomic fundamentals that were in place before 2019 have not gone away and still hamper the economy, and ultimately, the demand for fruit.

Imports into these SE Asian markets are still often quite modest and they are challenging places to do business and so need careful understanding going forward. This is as well as a sense of prioritisation. Where do we go first, which markets are most important for us, who will be our competition and what is the ultimate size of the prize?

All markets can look attractive for whatever reason, but some have to be more attractive than others in the end. It is important to know which these are and why

China

The potential here is very clear, but many do not still have a good feel for what is happening there in terms of production, distribution, the POS, imports and exports.

There is a strong need to find out more and be much better informed before significant resources are allocated to building a business there

Promotional organisations still often ask the question: “are we getting good value for money from our activities in international markets?”

There is only one way to find out. That is to carry out a combination of both qualitative and quantitative research over a period of time. There is a need too, to go back to the basics of fully understanding what constraints in the market are you looking to overcome, what opportunities exist and how is progress being achieved over a period of time?

There were, of course, other conversations taking place over the 3 days, but these struck me as being some of the most important. It goes without saying that in true Fruit Logistica style, a good deal of ground was covered (literally - around 15 km per day!) and that we will be back next year for Fruit Logistica number 31 - but probably via Fruit Attraction in Madrid.

Like many agri food industries, the strength of personal connections is a very important part of doing business, in our case, market research and consultancy, but maybe never more so than in the fresh produce sector.

I met a number of people last week that I have known for all of this time and never a truer word spoken when it is said “clients become friends not the other way round”. And

interestingly a comment from a colleague attending for the very first time “*wow, it’s so professionally organised*”.

So well done, Fruit Logistica, and here is to Berlin 2024 already!