

AUSTRALIA

Western Australian gets first mechanical cabbage harvester

Gary Ryan has become the first farmer in Western Australia to purchase and use a mechanical cabbage harvester and is putting it to work. The harvester was brought into the state in September 2016 by the Manjimup farmer.

The machine came at a huge cost however, Ryan claims to have paid around \$100,000 for the harvester at the time in order to better prepare for the possibility of a labor shortage after the backpacker tax fiasco. "When the backpacker tax thing started coming in we thought we would struggle to get workers going forward. Our contracts with cabbages doubled and we wearing a lot of people out," he said.

While the harvester was saving time Ryan said that it still uses the same amount of labor, maybe even one extra. "I now need four-tractor drivers and three or four guys on the back. It's a similar amount, maybe one extra."

Mr Ryan said the upfront costs of the harvester were "very expensive" and so far, it was not paying its way. "But I think it probably will in the future," he said. "It allows us to increase. Before when the processors asked us to increase we were a bit hesitant because we would run out of time during the week to get all other jobs done plus harvest cabbages."



BRAZIL

Brazil greenlights watermelon tech

Brazil Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Supply has given AgroFresh approval for the use of its SmartFresh SmartTabs post-harvest technology on watermelons.

Brazil exported 206,000 tonnes of melons in 2015. According to Abrafrutas, the Brazilian association of producers and exporters of fruit, the country is looking to continue to meet the increased international demand for tropical fruits, including melons. Technologies such as SmartFresh are important for delivering consistent quality and supply of fruit to market.

Jeferson Nunes, Latin America commercial director for AgroFresh said,

"AgroFresh is committed to investing in research to expand the benefits of SmartFresh technology to new crop segments. With the recent approval for watermelons, Brazilian suppliers will now have the tools to export more high-quality fruit to the growing European and Asian markets."

SmartFresh is a post-harvest application of 1-methylcyclopropene (1-MCP), which inhibits ethylene recognition in fruit, maintaining the quality and taste consumers prefer from storage to transportation and consumption. SmartTabs, one of three modes of delivery for SmartFresh technology, provides a convenient way to apply it in existing storage rooms or containers. SmartFresh also is registered for use on apples, avocados, bananas, limes, guavas, mangoes, plums, persimmons, tomatoes, papayas and kiwifruit in Brazil.

CHILE

Remarkable blueberry shipments this month

Recent rainfall in Chile raised alarm in various agricultural sectors. Fortunately for blueberry producers, the rains didn't have major consequences, as they are in the middle of the campaign. "Our projections remain the same as they were in the beginning. According to estimates there will be large volumes throughout the month of January and they will start to decrease in February," said Andres Armstrong, of the Chilean Blueberry Committee.



He further said, "This year our production started earlier than in previous years, so we found a saturated market and low prices at the beginning of the campaign. Currently, we feel less pressure because our production peaked last week and we had more stable returns. Additionally, the demand continues to grow worldwide, so we believe there won't be any major problems in the rest of the campaign," the representative stated.

The growing demand for this product could be primarily a result of the ongoing promotional activities that the association organizes worldwide. "These promotional campaigns are positioning the fruit. Investment and technological innovation is also beginning to bear fruit, and consumption of our blueberries continues to increase. This year China, Taiwan, France, and Spain stand out because of the amount of direct shipments we've made to these destinations," he concluded.

CHINA

China sees garlic, cashew and mandarin prices increase

Experts have blamed that the recent price hike seen by China in garlic over the last year, along with other agricultural products. Is due to currency exchanges and bad weather which affected orange prices.

Chairman of Sibü Grocery Dealers Association, Yeo Keng Teck, confirmed this yesterday, saying the wholesale sale price for a 20kg pack, which used to cost an already high price of USD \$40.13, was now USD \$51.28.

"Generally, prices of imported food are rising, but for some, the hike is not as significant as garlic and a few others. The exchange rate plays a major role, while for some, climate change is another determining factor."

For festive goods, Yeo said cashew nuts imported from India were another cause for concern, saying the nuts cost about 30 % more now. He confirmed mandarin oranges had also arrived, and they are dearer as well up by about 10 %.



EUROPE

Good European season for organic pumpkins

Fresh Organic Produce has already received the first Argentinian organic pumpkins of the season, soon to be followed by a batch from South Africa. By resorting to weekly deliveries, the service provider thus aims to guarantee a year-round supply. Hokkaido pumpkins are the first to arrive, followed by the Butternuts about three weeks later. "We have had a good European season; the market has again developed and this has led to the creation of more sales opportunities," explains Gerrit-Jan Roza, of Bio Fresh Produce.

"The supply from Argentina and South Africa is still arriving smoothly. Compared to last year, we have a greater volume available. Back then, we suffered from bad weather conditions, but so far this year, both the weather and the harvest conditions have been good. The program continues until the end of April. As

it stands now, we are getting a nice volume every week." The acreage devoted to Hokkaido pumpkins has doubled over the past year to 120 hectares. "At present, 60% of the production is already under contracts. That means there is still room for more sales."

At the distribution centre in Lelystad, the supply is washed, sorted and eventually classified by quality. "The pumpkins can be supplied in any packaging format and, if desired, they can include a label." From this centre, the company supplies retailers (65%) and organic specialty stores (35%). "Germany is a large market, but there is also plenty of demand from France, Spain, Belgium and the Netherlands. Last year, new IFS and BRC-certified facilities were built on location in Argentina to process second class quality pumpkins into IQF. This allows you to have a better selection for the fresh market. "There is demand for IQF and it goes without saying that this contributes to improve the crop's profitability," concludes Gerrit-Jan.



FRANCE

Support for French regions

French interprofessional organization Interfel has revealed its intention to strengthen collaboration with the 13 regions of France during 2017. The aim behind this initiative is to make better progress in areas such as support for consumption, research, experimentation, training and developing production.

The Pays de la Loire Regional Council was the first signatory from the fresh fruit and vegetables sector, with the signing taking place at Sival in the presence of Lydie Bernard, vice-president of the Regional Council of Pays de la Loire, and Bruno Dupont, president of Interfel.

JAPAN

Bananas grown in ice age conditions

By using a 'freeze -thaw awakening' method, Japanese agribusiness D&T Farm's has successfully grown bananas in a cold climate. D&T Farm's lead technical researcher, Setsuzo Tanaka, told Nikkei that bananas grow in just four months inside an experimental plastic greenhouse in western Japan.

The saplings are freezeed to minus 60 degrees then thawed and planted. Keeping the plants at a maximum day-time temperature of 13 degrees, and zero at night, the banana plants come out of hibernation and flourish. The method is based on what Earth's climate would have been like during the ice age, though it has been four decades of research and trials



as well as ¥500m (US\$4.3m) to successful grow cold climate bananas.

The farming method has caught the attention of local and international companies, with Osaka-based Air Water and a Minamikyushu based cooperative expected to begin producing bananas using Tanaka's seedlings, according to Nikkei.

NAMIBIA

Namibian grape exports hit N\$800m

According to figures from the country's Agro-Marketing and Trade Agency (Amta), with the country shipping some 5.1m cartons Namibian table grape exports hit N\$800m in 2016. Amta's Fidelis Mwazi told The Namibian that exports had suffered from a poor harvest last year, noting that, of the product that did go for export, some 85 % was sent to Europe with 15 %t going to Asia, Africa and other markets.

While the grapes are exported via Rotterdam to Europe, the industry experi-

mented with the idea of exporting via Lüderitz last year, with Mwazi telling the publication that it was still being investigated as a potential permanent loading point. Last season's pilot project at Lüderitz saw 34 containers exported, carried out by Amta, Namport and farmers.

SOUTH AFRICA

Early table grape region ships record volumes despite challenging conditions

Table grape region has set a new export record in South Africa's with more than 20m cartons being harvested despite fears about rain. South Africa's early table grape regions have surpassed expectations and have shipped record volumes of grapes despite challenging climatic conditions. The Orange River region has broken through the 20m carton barrier and could well be the leading South African grape region when the dust settles on the 2016/17 season. In the northern parts of South Africa grape growers have also had a bumper crop, shipping 15 per cent more than last season.

Observers say that the expected flow in table grape production in South Africa has finally arrived and new strategies will be required to deal with this in future. SATI, the industry body, recently confirmed that the South African table grape sector was still on target to reach its pre-season forecast of between 61m and 63m cartons. This compares with a total export volume of 59m cartons last year.

SATI has not issued a new forecast yet since the better than expected performances in the early regions have come to



light, but they may well have to do so soon. In the mid-season Olifant's River area the crop is running ahead of forecast, but in the Paarl region it is slightly behind last year. Shipments to Canada has more than doubled this season, without industry sources being able to give any particular reasons. On the other hand shipments to Russia so far this season is less than half of last year's volumes.

South African top fruit remains steady

Despite drought causing problems in certain areas, South Africa will have a normal apple and pear export crop this year. At a forecast of nearly 35m cartons, the apple export crop is expected to be 3 % up on last year, while at 17.8m cartons the pear export crop will be more or less the same as last year.

According to sources they expect another tough year in Europe and the UK for South African apples, but there will be more opportunities for pears. In announcing the first crop forecast of the season Hortgro confirmed this by saying that a tough season in terms of grower returns and profitability levels is anticipated.

"This is a result of the strengthening of the Rand against the major currencies, such as the US Dollar, UK Pound and Euro," the group said. "A normal pomefruit season is anticipated despite drought conditions affecting certain production areas. Although initially fruit size is slightly smaller than expected, the overall eating quality, including sugar content, is very good. In general, colour development and cosmetic pack-outs looks promising at this stage."



THE NETHERLAND

FTNON announces first iceberg lettuce decoring machine

Food Technology Noord-Oost Nederland (FTNON) recently announced the global release of the world's first robotic decoring machine for iceberg lettuce, the CoreTakt. This new innovation combines intelligent gripper technology with the robot techniques, advanced software and 3D-cameras. According to FTNON the combination of these product features result in more productivity and efficiency, amongst a broad range of other advantages it has to offer.

The CoreTakt is meant to be used at the beginning of production lines in the fresh cut industry. FTNON describes it as a highly intelligent device. Richard van der Linde, director of FTNON Delft, describes it as the 'sense – think – act' principle:

"First, the lettuce is scanned by five cameras that jointly give a peripheral scan of the product. The images of the cameras are combined by a powerful computer into one spatial model to detect the core of the lettuce. In flight, a 6th camera verifies the core position, and adapts the lettuce position if required. After that, the lettuce is accurately placed into the decoring mechanism. With the innovative decoring knives, only the undesired part of the lettuce is then cut out."

FTNON claims that the machine can decore up to 1.800 iceberg lettuce heads an hour, with a yield up to 96%. "After five years of research and development to



refine our technology, we are proud to show the industry what the CoreTakt is capable of" as stated by Van der Linde.

FTNON describes the CoreTakt as a 'smart' machine, as it produces a vast amount of data. "It produces up to a terabyte per unit of precious information hidden in that data. Most of it is related to various quality metrics", Van der Linde says.

Complementary to that, Andre van der Wei, Managing Director of the FTNON Group states "we analyse and share the collected data with our customers. Accordingly, we can meet the standards of relative legislation to product traceability requirements. Therefore customers know exactly which products entered their production facility at what specific time."

UKRAINE

Ukraine saw organic produce exports increase by 2.5 times in 2016

Ukrainian organic produce exports have grown 2.5 times and totaled 165,000 tons at the end of 2016, according to Mr. Sergey Galashevskiy, Director of Organic Standard, Ukraine. "Organic growers exported 165,000 tons of their products valued at more than 40 million euro last year", he said. Mr. Galashevskiy estimated Ukraine's organic exports to stand at just 67,000 tons worth 21 million euro in 2015 which shows an increase of 98,000 tons.

As Organic Ukraine, a union of certified organic growers of Ukraine, has already informed, it is expected that area under organic production may grow by 10% in 2017 and reach 450,000 ha. ♦