

AUSTRALIA

First mangoes at \$100 a tray

The first mangoes of the year have hit the markets, selling for around \$100 a tray. The bulk of Australia's mango harvest is still months away, but consumers can now expect fruit to trickle in from the Northern Territory. The season will be spread out and picking will last until November. Mangoes in August are early, yet last year the first mangoes were picked in June. The Australian mango industry produced its biggest and most valuable crop on record last year and is hopeful of another fantastic season.



BULGARIA

Trends of organic farming development in Bulgaria

From data provided by Department of Agroecology of Ministry of Agriculture and Food in Bulgaria, Valentina Agapieva at Agricultural University of Plovdiv has traced trends of organic farming development in the country during the period from 2003 to 2013. The total areas under organic agriculture method increased from 8,364 hectares in 2003 to 56,287 ha in 2013.



Bulgaria is the largest producer of organic rose oil in the world, one of the largest exporters of organic cucumbers in Europe, second in the EU by the size of certified organic properties for collection of wild fruits, herbs and mushrooms, and fourth in the EU in the number of certified organic bee colonies. Among organic crops, there are interesting productions of tomatoes, pepper and cucumbers as vegetable crops, and of apple and peaches as fruit crop. The main reason for the changes in organic farming is not only overproduction of subsidized crops, but

also increased sensitivity of European countries to protect the environment and the biodiversity.

Agapieva concludes: "Organic farming in Bulgaria is at an early stage but with great potential for development; the rapid development of organic agriculture in the last 20 years, driven by the pressure of the market forces and increased consumer demand, prompted organic farmers in Bulgaria to seek alternatives to conventional farming. Finally there are clearly identified and outlined positive trends of increasing the number of organic operators and organic farming areas."

FRANCE

Self-propelled harvester for green beans

Two French vegetable farmers, Gaël and Pierre Landais, have managed to boost their bean production by buying a self-propelled harvester, called the Big Jack, made in the USA. "Before, it would take us between 20 and 30 hours to harvest one hectare of beans," explains Gaël.



"With the new machine, we can do it in 5 hours". Whilst the new machinery is a significant investment for the brothers (bought second hand in the Indre-et-Loire for 100,000), it is the first self-propelled harvester in Charente and can harvest the 25 hectares of green beans in record time.

ITALY

New stretch film machine for fresh produce sector

Dekapack International, supplier of stretch film packaging machines and exclusive dealer of Italian Italdibipack Group, introduces the MAGIKA. The MAGIKA is a new compact, semi-automatic stretch film packaging machine, specifically made for the fresh produce sector. Due to the compact design, the machine can be easily placed on a work table and can therefore be used in very small production situations and small retail spaces. The machine snaps the stretch film around the trays, bowls and



bins, and, depending on what it's packing, can complete 15 packages per minute. Operation is simple, which makes it very efficient; everyone can use it. Dekapack demonstrates the machines in their showroom in Huizen, The Netherlands; they can also demonstrate the machine at your location upon request.

INDIA

Going organic helping farmers

Even as Maharashtra continues to grapple with an agrarian crisis, farmers in Latur, one of the drought-prone districts in the state, are slowly moving towards the organic way of farming to reduce input costs and increase agriculture output.

Planting variety of trees on the farmland, using organic manure and bio-enzyme in soil stabilization are some of the ways being adopted by the farmers for a healthy growth of crops that is safer for human consumption. "The government and researchers have been focusing mainly on how to increase the yield. But in the process, agriculture has become a costly affair with the use of costly fertilisers, pesticides and commercial seeds. If the farmer sells his harvest at Rs 100, then his input cost is Rs 80 and hence the profit is only Rs 20. And when crop fails, there is a huge debt burden due to the heavy expenditure on input costs," Mahadev Gomare, Latur Head of Sri Sri Institute of Agricultural Sciences and Technology Trust told PTI.



NEW ZEALAND

Fruit exports tasting sweet for New Zealand economy

Fruit exports in New Zealand has reached an all-time annual high of US\$ 2 billion in the year ended June 2015.

Major Bay of Plenty horticultural mainstay kiwifruit accounted for 59 % of the total value of fruit exports, followed by apples at 28 %, and avocados another strong Bay export at 5.7 %.

"Kiwifruit volumes are going strongly as the industry recovers from Psa," said Lain Jager, chief executive of kiwifruit export marketing company Zespri.

"Most of the volume growth is in our premium Zespri SunGold [G3] variety, which boosts our industry's earnings as growers benefit from a more profitable product mix."

Andrew Darling, chairman of the avocado exporters' council, AVEC, said after some tough years the industry was maturing and working closer together. "We are recognizing collectively the potential value of our industry and working on a common industry strategy to achieve greater growth," he says. "The Australian market remains crucial to New Zealand and planning our supply into Australia is a critical requirement which affects us all."

Statistics New Zealand said the total value of all fruit exported was up by 20 %, a US\$ 330 million increase, for the June 2015 year compared with the previous 12 month period. Both high prices and a nine per cent increase in export volume accounted for the increase.

"Record monthly fruit exports in April, May, and June 2015 led to an all-time high for the year ended June," said international statistics manager Jason Attewell.

Fruit exports in May 2015 had the highest-ever value for a month (at US\$ 445 million). June and April exports were the second- and third-highest, respectively.

Kiwifruit and apples led the monthly increases, with exports in May 2015 being the highest value recorded for both kiwifruit (US\$ 280 million) and apples (US\$157 million the European Union remains the biggest export destination, accounting for 27 % of fruit exports.

Japan at 14 % and China at 13 % were other top destinations in the June.



PHILIPPINES

Davao's banana exports down by 68.3% in Q1

Banana exports from Davao Region for the first quarter of this year dropped by 68.3 % as compared to the same period last year. Export Free on Board (FOB) value of bananas, including plantains, fresh or dried was pegged at US\$ 94.2 million from January to March, much lower as compared to US\$ 297 million during the same period last year. The banana export production in gross weight during the same period also decreased to 349,483,515 kilogram (kg.) as against last year's 808,611,852 kg.

POLAND

Makro Cash & Carry expands BIO organic range

Until recently, Makro's BIO range mainly included vegetables and herbs, such as onions, garlic, potatoes, beets, carrots, parsley and celery. From the second week of June, however, the range has been expanded to also include BIO fruit. The list of new products includes oranges, lemons, pineapples, avocados, kiwis, aubergines, courgettes, cucumbers and cherry tomatoes. "These are sold with the EU organic logo, a white leaf on a green background. Consumers are guaranteed that BIO fruits and vegetables have been cultivated in line with EU rules on environmental protection, with no fertilizers or pesticides," says Joanna Nakonieczna, Vegetables and Fruits Specialist at Makro. In Poland, organic farming has registered an increase in the acreage and the number of farms in



recent years, caused by the growing interest of consumers for such products. Between 2005 and today, this number has increased 11-fold. As a result, Poland holds the third place in the EU when it comes to the number of organic farms, only behind Italy and Spain.

ROMANIA

Organic food sales less than 0.5%

The consumption of bio products in Romania reaches less than 0.5 % of total food sales, according to a study by Republica BIO. By comparison, Austria or Germany reach around 7 to 8 % in bio products sales, influenced by numerous studies that confirm major endocrine and neuronal dysfunctions in children caused by pesticides, fertilizers and genetically modified organisms, the study says.

A recent survey by MEDNET Marketing Research Center shows that only a third of respondents trust bio products as being healthier than conventional ones, half of them consider them expensive and a quarter believe that everything is a marketing invention. However, once they get over this barrier, Romanians tend to choose imported brands, rather than local ones.

"To reach convergence with Germany and Austria (concerning percentage of market value of agricultural products), the bio products market in Romania should reach several hundred million euros annually. The potential is huge, in France, for example, 18,000 organic operators are certified annually and the potential in Romania is much higher than in France when it comes to bio agriculture. The vegetable-fruit market could double in the next 10 years from year to year. State incentives could increase the number of Romanian producers of organic products and would help lower the prices. It's very simple: the more we produce, the lower prices drop. The lower prices drop, the higher the number of bio products consumers will be," added Ciprian Stancu.

Republica BIO is also a producer of organic fruits and vegetables, but currently operates solely as an online retailer that sells certified organic products. The plan is to start selling products from their own farm next year.



TURKEY

Lemons too expensive for consumers

The usage of lemon due to high market prices has gone down amongst the consumers. Therefore, the lemon, which in Turkey has always been considered an indispensable part of the dinner table, has been dropped. On domestic markets lemons are sold for between 1.65-2.30 a kilo depending on quality, at some markets prices can reach 2.60-3.00.

With the arrival of summer, the lemon is not just an essential dinner table accompaniment, but also used for cold drinks, yet greengrocers report that they are selling lemons individually because they have become so expensive. Batman greengrocer, Halil Kardas, considers the price hike of lemons to be caused by the increase in lemon exports which has meant less produce on the domestic markets. He states, "Lemons are being exported to several countries from Turkey and because of this the amount of stock on the domestic markets has reduced. Therefore the reduced intake of lemons is directly reflected in the prices. Lemons aren't being bought in kilo weights as before. In the past a single lemon cost 0.08, now it is 0.33. The former dinner table essential has been abandoned by most people," he concluded.



USA

Less apples expected in Washington this year

Washington state is by far the largest producer of apples in the nation, with a vast majority of apples produced in the Yakima Valley. Last year's crop totalled a record of 150 million boxes. This year, industry experts are expecting a smaller crop, but nonetheless a good year. Export Marketing Director for the Washington

Apple Commission, Rebecca Lyons said, "We're expecting a harvest that will be shorter, we won't have as many apples as we did last year, but we should still have somewhere between 125-135 million cartons, which is still a lot of apples."

However, the record warm temperatures and water shortage in Yakima could be tremendous factors in the quality of this year's crops. "The challenge is with these temperatures and less water you could expect smaller fruit," said de La Chapelle. He says his crops have already been affected by the heat, causing sunburn and other damages that have caused a lot of his apples to go bad. "We're working as best as we can and we are hoping Mother Nature cooperates and provides us with more congenial temperatures for us to mature our crops and pick them," he said.

This year, growers will also begin to pick apples earlier than previous years. 'Early Golden' apples are currently being harvested by some growers and Galas are a few weeks ahead of schedule. "Well we anticipate starting harvest very soon, which would be about 10 days ahead of normal," said de La Chapelle. Yet the kick off to an early harvest season isn't the most concerning part for growers. Most are worried about the drought conditions



causing pain to the region. "We have another bad year like this next year there will be a lot of people like me that won't be in business," added de La Chapelle.

Organic product line to include organic onions

Veg-Fresh Farms' fresh division, Good Life Organic, is adding organic red, white, and yellow onions to its product line. Demand is expected to be high for these new items this summer, as Ryan Galindo, a buyer for Good Life™ Organic, explains, "The onion market has been strong this summer and with the continued growth in customer's demand for organic produce, Good Life™ Organic onions couldn't be launching at a better time." Good Life™ Organic will be offering its customers three sizes of organic onions, including 16/3 lb. bags, 40 lb. stickered cartons, and 50 lb. sacks. Currently, production is being harvested in the Lancaster, Bakersfield, California area and will transition to the Pacific Northwest in October. "Good Life™ Organic onions will be supplying the marketplace organic onions year round from California and the Pacific Northwest," said Anthony Innocenti, Organic Category Manager for Good Life™ Organic. All Good Life™ Organic labels include the USDA Organic seal and the QAI logo, which states that the produce has been certified organic by Quality Assurance International. Research shows that using the USDA organic seal is believed to be responsible for increased



consumer trust and a willingness to pay more for organics.

US (CA):

Plant tape could make planting more efficient

Growers in just about every part of the country have had issues finding enough workers to plant, maintain and harvest crops. While the labor issues that have caused shortages in the field are complex and will take time to solve. Therefore new transplanting technology can make more efficient use of the labor that is available.

With Plant Tape, seeds are placed in a growing medium sandwiched between two layers of biodegradable tissue. The resulting tape is then placed on a tray where it can be stored dry or watered immediately for germination. Once germinated, growers can determine how long they allow the seedlings to grow before they transplant to the field. When ready to transplant, the tape containing the seedlings is fed into a machine that automatically plants the seedlings.

The planting process requires one driver and two people to work the machine, which is significantly fewer people than the 15 to 20 workers who make up traditional transplanting crews. The system has many benefits over traditional transplanting methods, but one of the benefits garnering the most attention is the more efficient use of workers. Not only are fewer workers required, but the crew can also cover ground in less time.

"From transplanting to harvest, there's quite a bit of movement toward automated technology," said Caitlin Antle Wilson of Tanimura and Antle. "A lot of that has to do with labor." Plant Tape technology was developed in Spain and acquired by Tanimura and Antle in 2014. Antle Wilson said they've been perfecting the system for the North American market over the last few years, and she expects they will reach commercialization towards the end of 2016. ♦

