

MADAGASCAR

Race against time for Madagascar

Due to delays to the start of the season, Madagascar lychee exporters face a race against the clock to secure sales on the European market

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One of the main challenges for Madagascar lychee exporters this season will be to sell a smaller crop at a good price, something that will evidently require the cooperation of each and every operator.

The 2009 lychee campaign is due to start around a fortnight later this year, according to Madagascar exporters, with fruit only ripening towards the end of November. This poses a problem, since the most profitable period for Madagascar lychee exporters is that before Christmas.

Another problem concerns logistics. Due to increasing insecurity in the region, down to the presence of pirates, boats shipping Madagascar lychees



Madagascar lychees could arrive late this year

are forced to make a detour that will extend the journey time from 13 days to around 15 days. Such a delay means that Madagascar lychees risk arriving late on the European market. On the French market, retailers will have a window of only around five days to sell Madagascar lychees, as opposed to an ideal period of 7-10 days.

Nevertheless, such a situation could

offer some advantages for Madagascar exporters, according to local publication Midi Madagasikara. The shorter availability period may engender higher prices. However, operators will have to regulate shipments, exporters warn. French consumers, for example, consume around 1,440 tonnes of lychees a day during the Christmas period. Given the small window available, Madagascar exporters will struggle to cope if they continue to ship this amount

This is only a slight increase over last year's volumes, but the main positive is the progress we have made regarding fruit quality and client satisfaction."

According to Mr Rakotondrahova, the main requirements of the company's clients are a quality product and GlobalGAP certification. "They are becoming more and more demanding with regard to MRLs and traceability," he adds. "We hope that the quality of our product will make the difference."

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each day. There is a need, therefore, to ensure there is not too much fruit on the market at the same time. For the five-day window, Madagascar exporters should ship around 720 tonnes a day to the French market, Midi Madagasikara recommends.

Yvan Razakandisa, MD of exporter Quality Mad, expects his company to export some 450 tonnes this season. "The campaign will start a little late due to the climatic conditions," he tells Eurofruit Magazine. "We therefore need to regulate our volumes. The ideal situation is to not have too much fruit on the market at the same time given the short time the importers have to sell the product."

Each year, he says, the company is looking to penetrate more markets in order to develop the sector and increase the recognition of Madagascar lychees. "A good number of countries in Europe still do not know lychees," he says.

Simon Rakotondrahova, of exporter Scrimad, believes that quality control is essential in order to further the reputation of Madagascar lychees. "Our main challenge each year is to fully satisfy our clients," he says. "Our second task is to try to make Madagascar the benchmark for lychee exports. We are therefore investing again this year in improving the quality of our product."

"We expect volumes of conventional lychees to reach around 500 tonnes this campaign, while non-conventional fruit should grow to around 1,300 tonnes.

Ralay Philly, of Kwai Chung, agrees that quality is the priority. However, he says that the quality of the product has little bearing on the price earned. "High quality is the main demand of our clients," he says, "but that doesn't lead to better prices for us. We believe that consumers are buying less as a result of the economic crisis. The drop in demand in relation to the supply available could lead to a drop in prices. Although ensuring that you have the highest quality doesn't necessarily impact on the price, it does, however, help to gain customer loyalty."

Kwai Chung, Scrimad and Quality Mad are all part of the Pesticides Initiative Programme (PIP), which helps growers and exporters to gain the necessary certifications and quality level to ship to the European market. With the first phase of the programme now complete, Madagascar exporters are now looking to see how PIP 2 can aid them.

"In PIP 1, we learnt how to install and manage a quality control system and worked on strengthening the abilities of our personnel," says Mr Rakotondrahova. "For PIP 2, we would like to see the programme focus more on the practical side of things, both on the level of the business and on that of the small producers. By the practical side, we mean the implementation of established quality processes and the management of the quality control system. However, the major problem for us still lies in a lack of material and financial means." ■