

REPORT

—Serbia



KOPER MAKING A BIGGER SPLASH

It was another milestone year in 2017 for Slovenia's Port of Koper, which reportedly broke new throughput records in almost all cargo segments, including fresh produce. This year that trend appears to be continuing for fruit and vegetables, with arrivals of Egyptian potatoes (mainly for Germany), oranges (mostly bound for Czech Republic and Poland) and table grapes (for Germany, Netherlands, Scandinavia and the UK) said to be booming.

"In peak season, we received two direct vessels per week loaded with up to 450 40ft reefer containers," reveals Milena Slobko-Jerman, sales and marketing manager at port operating company Luka Koper. "The season is slowing down already, but we are close to handling 2,000 containers of grapes between mid-May and the end of June, which is much more than before."

Koper has positioned itself as a useful transit point for a range of different products. As well as helping Egyptian and Israeli exporters reach European markets, it also acts as a launchpad for Polish apple exports to the Mediterranean and Middle East, with good potential also seen in new connections to the Far East and India. "Our advantage remains that all port community services, including inspection and customs, are available seven days a week, with the same high-quality performance at weekends as on any working day," Slobko-Jerman adds.

Container connections with Egypt are improving every year as more services are added; the shortest transit time is now just 4-5 days, with Hapag-Lloyd.

"With Israel we have two direct container services weekly, calling at Koper as first port in the Adriatic after Haifa and Ashdod, and with a transit time of 3-4 days, same as with Egypt during the grape season," she adds. "We also receive also bananas, mainly for Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia."

Serbian suppliers step into the spotlight

LONDON—The USAID-backed project Serbia Does Fruit is bringing a message of quality and dependability to buyers and importers in key markets.

by Mike Knowles

Serbian exporters have established a new marketing project to raise awareness of the country's fresh fruit offer. Serbia Does Fruit, which made its debut at the London Produce Show in June, is aiming to capture the attention of produce buyers and importers across Europe.

Crucially, it has the backing of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Aleksandar Palovic, who is based in Belgrade as chief of party for USAID's Competitive Economy Project, says the project will help exporters make better connections. "We believe that the trade show in London will help Serbian fruit producers to better position themselves on the UK market. It is important to diversify our exports and to enter new international markets," he explains.

The new campaign, which focuses on Serbia's suitability as a produc-

er, delivers a clear message: "Food and agriculture, and especially fruit, is a strong part of the Serbia tradition and identity." This, the opening line of a specially designed briefing document, reflects a desire among producers to build their reputation in markets that will appreciate the quality of their products.

"We believe now is the right time to establish a business relationship with the UK," adds Julka Toskić, the director of marketing agency Agrobrand, which is also working on the project. "In the future, the UK can expect a wide range of fruit and vegetables from Serbia."

MORE THAN CAPABLE

It's increasingly clear that Serbia has huge potential in terms of its production capacity. According to Serbia Does Fruit, the country exported fresh, frozen and dried fruit worth €660m last year, and



OPPOSITE—Verda Vivo and Agrounija's orchard development in Vojvodina
LEFT—Members of the Serbia Does Fruit project during their visit to the Fruitnet Media International office in June

was the largest exporter of frozen fruit – raspberries mainly, but also other berries and stonefruit – to France and Germany. Blueberries, for example, are emerging as a key product, to the extent that Serbia is close to planting more than 1,000ha with the fruit.

Companies joining Serbia Does

Fruit in London were: Agroprom Com, Al Dahra Rudnap, Atos Fructum, Ćirić Agro MđZ, Green Energy, Juzni Banat, Pollino Agrar and Verda Vivo. The majority are apple producers, a category in which Serbia also wants to boost its international profile. With production now around 400,000 tonnes per year, the country is on a par with the Netherlands, Spain and Romania in terms of apple output; and with a number of licensed types such as Pink Lady, Evelina, Kiku and Crimson Snow already in

the mix, there is a new sense of confidence among growers that the country can play an even more important role in the fresh market. At the same time, the country's extensive production is gradually being converted to a more intensive, more sophisticated model.

"After the fair in London I am quite sure that we are ready for the UK market," states Jovana Matkovic of Agroprom. "Our biggest advantage is we can offer high-quality products at an affordable price. With our growing orchards, high-end harvesting technologies and cold-storage systems, we can offer fresh products all year round." 



Central Europe
via Port of Koper >>
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City	Transit Time
Moscow	4-5 days
Riga	3 days
Copenhagen	2.5 days
Helsingborg	2.5 days
London	2 days
Rotterdam	1 day
Berlin	1 day
Frankfurt	1 day
Prague	1 day
Warsaw	2 days
Vienna	0.5 day
Budapest	0.5 day
Milan	0.5 day
Belgrade	1 day

Port of Koper REEFER TERMINAL




www.luka-kps.si