

Producer country file

The blueberry in Chile

by Cécilia Céleyrette

This little berry has become within the space of a few years one of the jewels of the Chilean range, rapidly spreading over a large part of the country. While initially aimed primarily at the North American market, in fresh or deep-frozen form, it has rapidly conquered other markets such as Europe and now Asia. Boosted by a varietal renewal with plumper, firmer and more colourful fruits, the Chilean blueberry should over the coming years be able to withstand the increasingly strong competition issuing from other Southern Hemisphere countries.





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Blueberry – Chile

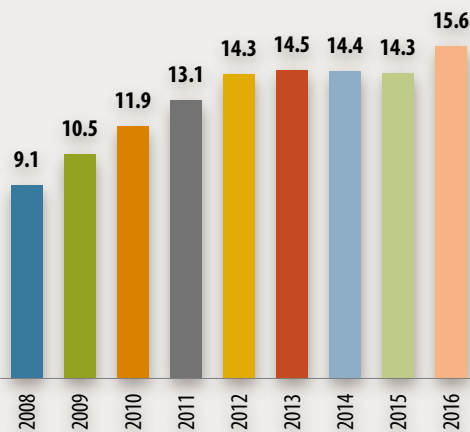
Location

Chile's first plantations were set up in the late 1980s in the south of the country, though the high prices obtained in October and November encouraged operators to plant further north too. The country's central zones are those which have seen the biggest expansion in recent years. The bulk of the production is currently situated between Regions VI and X, between Copiapó and Puerto Montt, for a production peak going from January to mid-February. The majority of the production comes from the Bío and Maule regions.

Production

Production has grown steadily, with a surge at the beginning of this decade which propelled it from less than 50 000 t before 2008 to more than 100 000 t after 2010. Thereafter the tonnage stagnated at around 100 000 t, with an ageing cultivation stock. It is now taking an upturn thanks to the planting of new, more productive varieties which are better-suited to demand and transport. The potential is reportedly now in excess of 130 000 t, and could reach 150 000 t this campaign, for a planted surface area also set to rise to at least 15 600 hectares. Production is diversifying with the development of an organic segment which reportedly already represents nearly 10 % of surface areas.

Blueberry - Chile - Planted areas
(in 000 ha / source: CIREN)



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Blueberry – Chile

Production calendar and varieties

Blueberry – Chile – Production calendar

Variety	O	N	D	J	F	M
Emerald						
Star						
Ventura						
O'Neal						
Duke						
Legacy						
Birgitta						
Camellia						
Brightwell						
Ochlockonee						
Elliot						

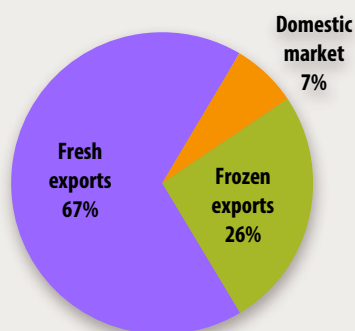
The blueberry season extends over nearly seven months in Chile, thanks to the planting of different varieties and to numerous local areas spread from north to south. Hence the season begins in early October in the northern regions, and ends in April with the southern regions. Numerous varieties have been planted in Chile since the introduction of this berry (at least fifty or so in thirty years), and the challenge for the producers today lies in selecting the varieties best-suited to the pedoclimatic conditions of each zone, with requirements in terms of yield but also size and transport & disease resistance. Also, more than twenty new varieties derived from programmes in Spain, Australia and the USA have recently been introduced to the country. And while old varieties such as O'Neal, Misty, and

of course Duke and Elliot are still highly representative (nearly 70 % of tonnages), others such as Star, Jewel, Emerald, Brightwell, Ochlockonee or Liberty have made room for themselves with yields of more than 20 t/ha, while the old varieties are stuck at around 8 to 12 t/ha. Some, such as Tifblue or Brightwell, are even registering 25 or 30 t/ha, and varieties such as Camellia or Primadonna are sought after for their size (> 20 mm) or their coloration. Other varieties such as Bluecrop are still retained for dual purposes, fresh and frozen, since they have good resistance to dehydration. The variety Legacy is very popular since it enables mechanised harvesting. New varieties such as Snowchaser, Farthing and Scintilla are also being tested. Producers are now targeting varieties for mid-season or late production, from December onward, to limit competition with Mexico and Peru.

Outlets

Production is primarily aimed at the fresh exports sector, though this can be offset with frozen sales depending on the level of US stock in particular. Local consumption volumes are very low.

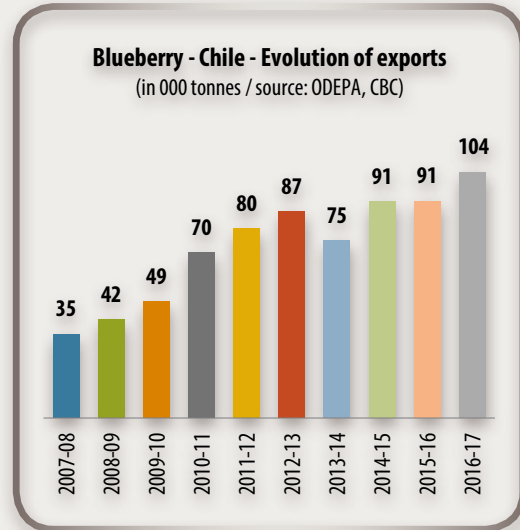
Blueberry - Chile - Outlets in 2016
(sources: CIREN, ODEPA / processed by Infofruit)



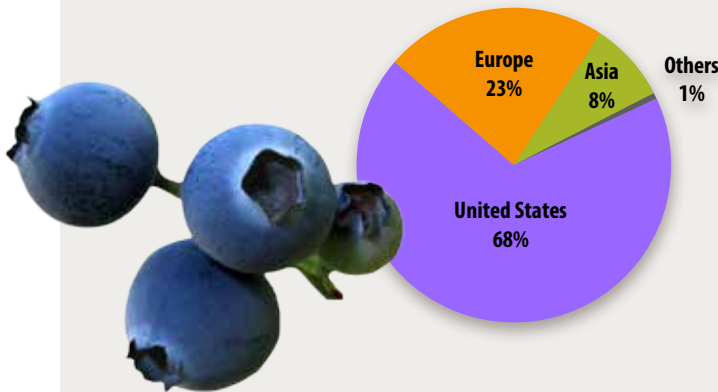
Blueberry – Chile

Exports

Exports have steadily increased in pace with the production growth and as markets have opened up, to reach more than 100 000 t today. The USA remains Chile's main customer, though shipments to this market have stagnated in recent years with increased competition from Peru and Mexico. Europe is also an important destination in the customer portfolio of Chilean exporters. It is still growing, with nearly 23 000 t imported in 2016-17 (+ 16 % on 2015-16), primarily by the United Kingdom and via the Netherlands, ahead of Asia which is still seeing steep growth (+ 53 %). Consumption has seen particular growth in China (9 500 tonnes in 2016-17, + 75 % on 2015-16), though other countries such as South Korea, Japan or Taiwan are also destinations registering distinct growth. Exports of organic production are also on the rise, reportedly reaching 8 500 tonnes last campaign.



Blueberry - Chile - Exports in 2016-17
(sources: ODEPA, CBC)



Logistics

The blueberry's very good conservability has helped tonnages increase, including for long-distance exports, where voyage times may be around 25 days or more. Nonetheless the produce must be harvested and cooled rapidly in order to keep well. Packing in a modified atmosphere helps it better withstand the voyage for the most distant destinations.

Blueberry – Chile – Sea freight

Markets	Main lines		Transit time
	Port of departure	Port of arrival	
Northern Europe	Valparaiso, San Antonio, Coquimbo	France (Dunkirk, Marseilles, Le Havre)	20-21 days
		Germany (Hamburg, Bremen)	
		United Kingdom (Sheerness, Felixstowe, Tilbury)	
		Belgium (Zeebrugge, Antwerp)	
		Netherlands (Rotterdam, Flushing)	
Southern Europe	Valparaiso, San Antonio	Italy (Vado, Genova, Vilarno)	17 days
		Spain (Algeciras)	
Russia		St. Petersburg, Vladivostock	
United States	Valparaiso, San Antonio, Coquimbo	East Coast (Philadelphia)	15-22 days
		West Coast (Los Angeles, Long Beach, San Diego)	12-17 days
China	Valparaiso, San Antonio	Guangzhou, Shanghai, Dalian	
Japan	Valparaiso, San Antonio	Tokyo, Kobe, Yokohama,	25 days

Source: Infofruit