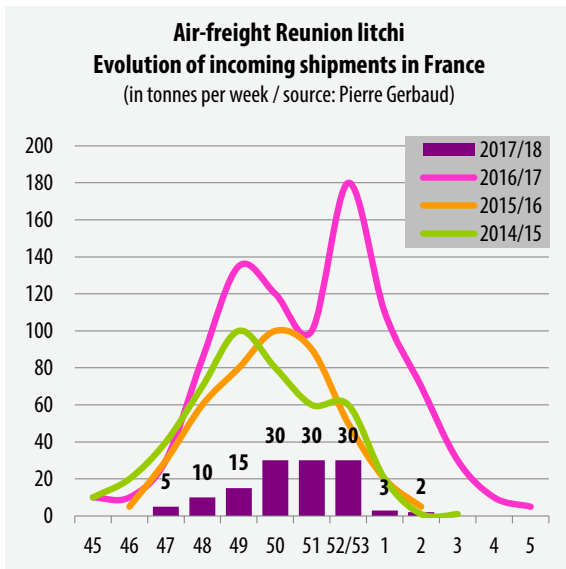


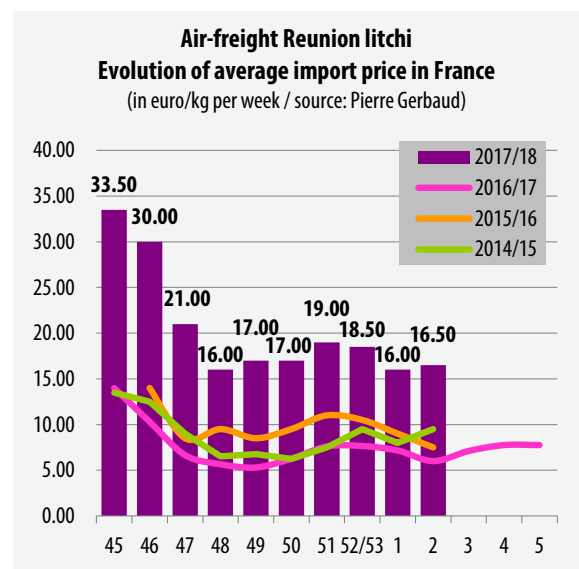
Litchi Reunion

In freefall

by **Pierre Gerbaud**



In 2016-17, Reunion caused a real surprise with the magnitude and suddenness of its litchi exports. The 400 to 500 tonnes usually shipped were easily exceeded, with 885 tonnes earmarked for Mainland France. Thus Reunion hoisted itself up to be the number one air-freight litchi supplier, doubling its volumes in the space of one campaign. This quantitative rise was accompanied by a slump in prices, but did not cause any real fall in rates. The 2017-18 was as lean as the 2016-17 campaign was abundant. With 125 to 150 tonnes of exports, Reunion recorded its most modest campaign. The main cause was the poor weather conditions during the fruit production cycle. The mild Southern winter and irregular precipitation led to lean and fragile production. The first batches were forwarded to local markets. The first shipments went onto the European market during week 45, the usual start of campaign period. The difference from previous years was illustrated by the paucity of shipments, which did not exceed tens of boxes. These unrepresentative fruits for such a rare product sold at stratospheric prices (up to 35.00 euros/kg). From around 30.00 euros/kg in week



46, the Reunion litchi rate dipped thereafter given the higher overall availability on the market. However, it remained particularly high throughout the campaign, with levels of 13.00 to 16.00 euros/kg for destalked fruits, and 16.00 to 20.00 euros/kg for trussed fruits. This year, on top of Reunion's top-end image acquired over the campaigns, came the notion of rarity boosting the product value. The small quantities were mainly sold in the last three weeks of December, corresponding to the period of strongest demand during the end-of-year festivities. Sales prices remained very high. They dipped thereafter while volumes collapsed. Still very expensive after the end-of-year holidays, Reunion's litchis had more difficulty selling due to greater qualitative fragility, which did not justify such price levels. Purchasers rapidly lost interest in the product for these last marginal batches. The majority of Reunion's litchis sold this year came in destalked form (loose or in trays) and trussed form, with a minimal proportion of on-stem litchis. The abundance of on-stem fruits provided by competing origins doubtless steered this choice by Reunion's shippers to stand out in the particular context of this 2017-18 season. In any event, this season was unfavourable for exports from Reunion, going against the surge in recent years. While Reunion remains a benchmark in terms of the litchi, the 2017-18 campaign certainly did not obtain satisfactory results. True, prices were high, yet the drastic lack of merchandise consigned this campaign to obscurity for the litchi industry. The good results of a campaign can of course be illustrated by the sale prices achieved, as well as by volumes corresponding to the potential of an origin. Yet in the particular case of Reunion, the exceptional limitation of the supply this year hampered the expected returns ■

