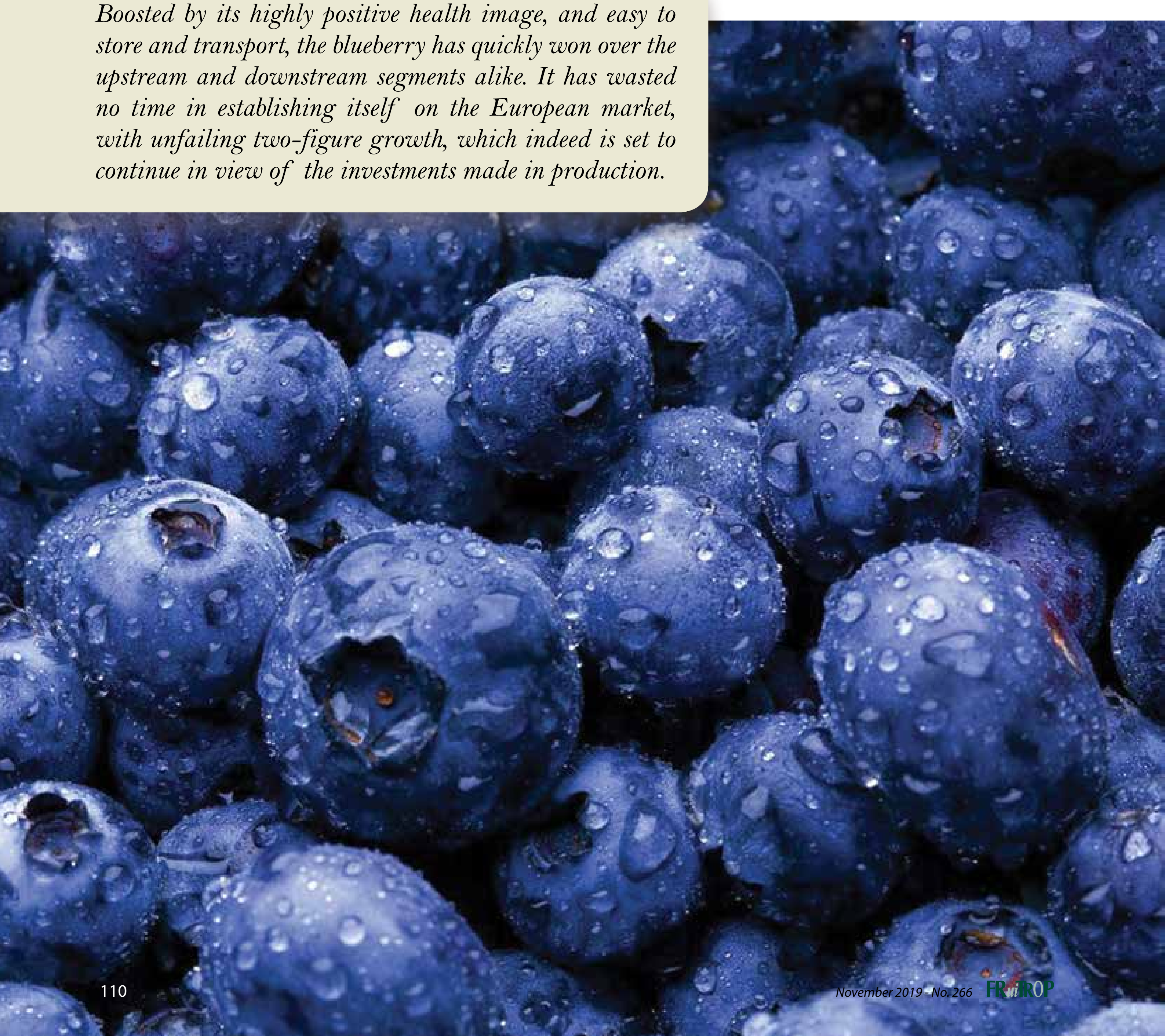
Blueberry

The little berry soaring up and up

Boosted by its highly positive health image, and easy to store and transport, the blueberry has quickly won over the upstream and downstream segments alike. It has wasted no time in establishing itself on the European market, with unfailing two-figure growth, which indeed is set to continue in view of the investments made in production.



European market: some fine performances

European blueberry imports are on a constant upward trajectory. The development of this little berry, initiated by Chile, has wasted no time in getting going in both hemispheres. Extra-EC imports and intra-EC flows alike are up on average by more than 20 % per year. The majority of tonnages comes from third countries, with 71 000 t imported into Europe in 2018, as opposed to 24 000 t from Member States, including some re-exports. Chile, hitherto the driving force of growth, remains the main supplier, with nearly 24 000 t (16 % above the 3-year average), though Peru is now hot on its heels, making giant strides on the export markets (20 000 t in Europe in 2018, i.e. 172 % above the 3-year average). With its big development ambitions, this origin is indeed capable of overtaking Chile.

South Africa also seems to have engaged top gear, albeit without yet the same intent as the main South American origins (6 000 t, i.e. 93 % above the 3-year average). Argentina (4 000 t) and Uruguay (495 t) top up the counter-season supply, but are struggling to gain a foothold against the major players.

The other main development concerns the Mediterranean origins, especially Morocco. Conversions have been going full steam ahead in recent years due to the economic and phytosanitary difficulties encountered by other crops, such as the strawberry or tomato. Hence many orchards have been planted with the raspberry and blueberry. The high export tempo has rapidly propelled Morocco, since 2017, to the number 3 extra-European supplier, with a volume of 13 000 t in 2018 (139 % above the 3-year average). Production is also on the up in Europe, with volumes on the market coming primarily from Spain (7 500 t), Portugal (1 000 t) and Northern Europe (Germany, Benelux).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Blueberry – EU-28 – Extra-Community imports

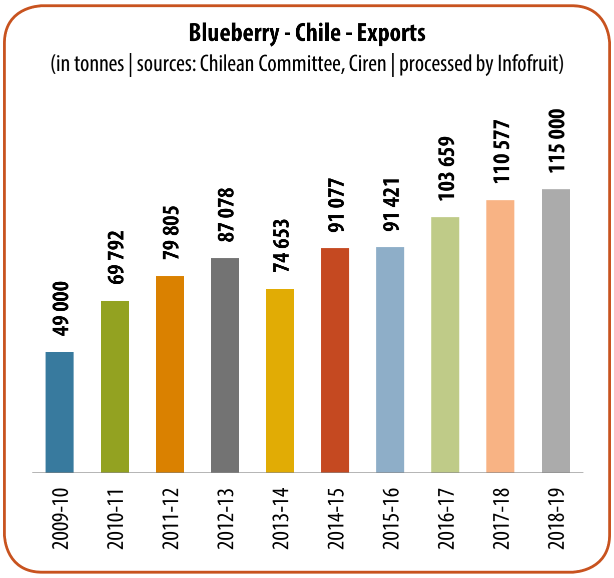
in tonnes	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	3-year average	2018 compared to 2017	2018 compared to 3-year average
Chile	7 816	10 439	12 225	17 867	21 673	19 912	20 387	23 932	20 657	+ 17 %	+ 16 %
Peru	2	28	335	744	2 658	6 741	13 324	20 623	7 574	+ 55 %	+ 172 %
Morocco	374	440	550	1 466	2 160	3 489	10 736	13 078	5 462	+ 22 %	+ 139 %
South Africa	976	1 180	1 375	1 671	1 802	3 448	5 196	6 737	3 482	+ 30 %	+ 93 %
Argentina	4 671	4 319	3 776	5 103	4 322	5 029	4 564	4 035	4 638	- 12 %	- 13 %
United States	1 143	1 154	1 244	1 059	1 145	2 238	1 550	1 090	1 644	- 30 %	- 34 %
Ukraine	4	8	10	96	295	142	1 174	696	537	- 41 %	+ 30 %
Uruguay	1 359	1 172	919	946	648	678	421	495	582	+ 18 %	- 15 %
Mexico	3	28	62	140	113	163	150	410	142	+ 174 %	+ 189 %
Others	812	444	835	839	727	518	636	682	627	+ 7 %	+ 9 %
Total Extra-EU	**17 159**	**19 212**	**21 330**	**29 930**	**35 542**	**42 358**	**58 137**	**71 778**	**45 346**	**+ 23 %**	**+ 58 %**

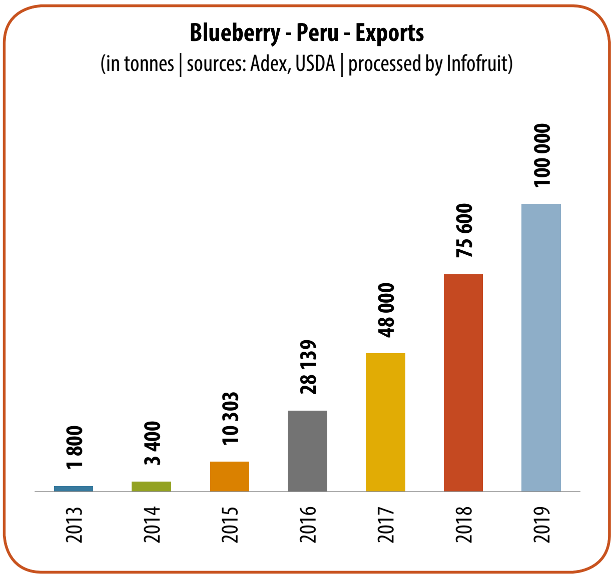
Source: Eurostat

Chile getting things back in hand

After a spell of stagnation, Chilean blueberry production is rallying somewhat, with the conversion of old orchards and the development of production in new regions. Hence the Chilean Blueberry Committee has announced that exports should set a new record this year of 115 000 t (+ 4 % on 2017-18), although climate conditions have not been exceptional. The cold requirements were not fully met, and a whole string of minor frosts in August slightly reduced the potential. However, the renewal of old varieties and expansion of planted areas, especially in Maule, Ñuble and Biobío, should enable a harvest of 160 000 t for a total surface area of 18 374 ha. Yet the choice by Chilean operators not to export the old, fragile varieties is curtailing the exportable potential. However, it should climb in the coming years due to the better yields of the new varieties, and the new plantations. So we should expect significant developments in the years to come.

The campaign this year started early, a week ahead of schedule. The climate conditions are favourable, with temperatures rising in the early zones of Valparaiso and Coquimbo. However, logistics have been disrupted by social movements since 18 October 2019, though the situation should soon return to normal, and exports should increase.





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Blue on the horizon

Yet the strongest surge can be seen in Peru, where blueberry plantations are rapidly expanding. Surface areas have doubled in the space of two years, going from 4 000 ha to 8 000 ha (+ 18 % on 2018). The Peruvians are banking on soon becoming the number one exporter country ahead of Chile. This year, they are planning to pass the 100 000-t threshold.

Other countries such as Colombia are also looking to develop their production, to be among the top 10 blueberry exporters within a few years. Moroccan production should also continue to increase. Still concentrated in the north of the country and in Souss, it could also start up further south, where big groups are making plans for this crop in the Dakhla zone, which is set for major developments (desalination, logistics) ■

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