

REPORT
—Serbia



Blueberry partners cheer growth

BELGRADE—Serbian blueberries have a bright future, with recent growth linked to rising quality standards and investments in the latest technologies.

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Partners since 2017, Hladnjače Brestovik and Borovnica Brestovik of Serbia and Kusibab Wyka of Poland have discovered the benefits of teamwork in the blueberry business. Just south of the Danube, around 30km from central Belgrade, Hladnjače Brestovik (Cold Storage Brestovik) boasts its 1,600m² facility, and from there members of the Blueberry Producers Association serve their customers in Serbia, the EU and Russia.

Last year, according to Milan Savković of Borovnica Brestovik, the partners exported a total of 1,700 tonnes of blueberries. “We will double this volume in the coming two to three years,” he says. “Lots of growers are starting up new production so that’s where the increase is coming from. There is currently around 1,500-2,000ha of blueberry production in Serbia, much of it still young plants. We expect the production area to stabilise around 2,000-3,000ha.”

According to Branimir Ivović of Hladnjače Brestovik, one of the most important developments has been its investment in the latest

technologies to sort blueberries. “Before we did it all manually,” he says, “but two years ago we invested in machines. When the quantities grow to such levels, you need this technology.”

Ivović stresses the importance of close relations between the growers and the coldstores. “We are trying to educate our producers to work more with the EU and UK,” he says. “It is better, more reliable and easier to export to the EU than to Russia, where the prices are always different. We have all the necessary certifications. In this respect, support from USAID is crucial. It’s more the backing and reputation of USAID than the financial support itself, but people see USAID behind us and they want to work with us.”

For Veljko Jovanović of Serbia’s chamber of commerce and industry, Serbian blueberries have an extremely bright future. “We want to keep this category growing,” he says. “A couple of years ago, we understood the need to find new markets and boost our standards. We have the quality and now we are seeing opportunities arise.”

Serbia is also a big player in rasp-



TOP—Rising production volumes require increased automation
LEFT—Snežana Janković, Serbian Ambassador to Germany

berries, says Jovanović, but only in frozen. “In fresh, we’re a little late,” he says. “It’s a matter of varieties and logistics. It is difficult to get growers to switch to fresh when they all have great facilities for frozen and the right varieties. There is also less risk in frozen due to a lack of waste.”

At Fruit Logistica, Snežana Janković, Serbia’s ambassador to Germany, showed the government’s support for the country’s producers, both of berries and apples. “In the last decade, Serbia’s presence at Fruit Logistica was not that large, so it’s great to see 20 companies representing Serbia this year on the Serbia Does Fruit stand. We are famous for our fruit and vegetables, and we hope that German customers will be able to discover the Serbian origin.”