Fruit Logistica 2004

Where it's all happening

With the 2004 event held in Berlin from 5 to 7 February 2004, Fruit Logistica has certainly become *the* European event in fruit and vegetables. The 2004 edition was excellent, with regard to both the numerous exhibitors from all over the world (more than 1 100 from 54 countries) and the ever-increasing number of visitors (22 000 against slightly less than 16 000 in 2003—a record increase of nearly 40 percent) spread over the three days of the event.

Fruit Logistica was such a success this year that the organisers had to dissociate it from Green Week for lack of sufficient space to house both events at the same time. Many of the visitors we talked to were enthusiastic about the concentration and quality of the contacts they made and intend to come back in 2005. Fruit Logistica has completely ousted SIAL/ANUGA, where fruits and vegetables are lost in the vast mass of processed products of all kinds (beverages, grocery products, etc.) and is marginalising the other annual fruit and vegetable event, AGF TOTAAL (in the Netherlands).

The major European names in distribution did not participate by manning stands but their head-hunters prowled the aisles in search of suppliers. Their absence did not shock the exhibitors, who consider the show as a family meeting of producers in the broad sense and of trade operators (shippers, exporters, importers and wholesalers).

Defining the main trends of a show with such a variety of produce and origins is not easy and *FruiTrop* proposes one reading among others. Above all, the event revealed a marked return to produce—to fresh fruit and vegetables. The trend for 'fresh-cut' that attracted many comments in 2003 proved to be a flash in the pan and now seems to be addressed with a little less enthusiasm and a little more realism. Such products are more the work of world agrifood groups (Nestlé, Danone, etc.) and their success depends above all on the setting up of a logistic chain and better mastery of production costs. Del Monte has been one of the only companies to continue with emphasis on a product line and a new and much-noticed snack product consisting of a bag containing several pieces of pineapple with peel.

The defenders of fruit and vegetable consumption were also silent. The determination showed by the sector as a whole at the last Freshfel congress to fight the shrinking of the fresh fruit and vegetable market seems to find it difficult to turn into concrete action. The German edition of the 5-a-Day campaign was the only initiative in evidence. It is true that attack by the Atkins diet from the US, favouring decreased carbohydrate in food, has not yet reached Europe. But intense marketing efforts via information for consumers would form a very effective barrier to its probable arrival.

A return to hedonism

The concepts 'organic', 'fair trade', 'health', 'conservation', etc. were obviously present but not in the forefront. We have truly returned to the pleasure given by the product in which taste, colour, novelty, exoticism and origin are clearly dominant. There is growing awareness of the essential comparative advantages of the sector that were too long used by the dairy industry and recycled via the marketing of ultra-fresh products.

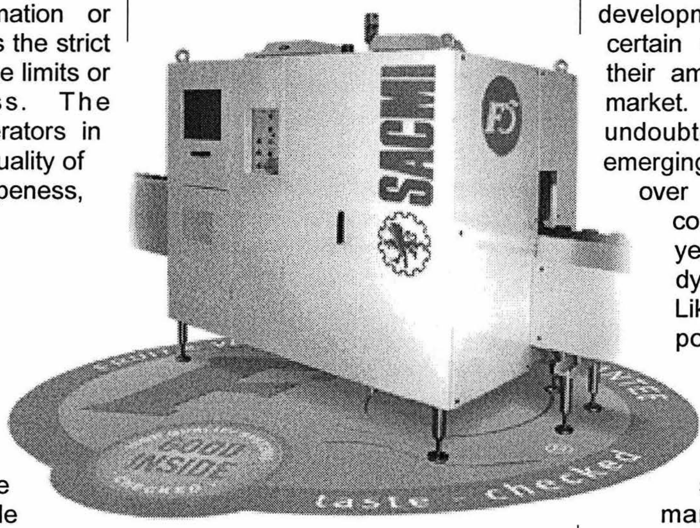
Production methods with more respect for the environment (organic, 'rational', etc.) are no longer highlighted. This does not mean that the fashion has changed but rather that these environmental concepts have been incorporated in basic produce supplies. This kind of ordinariness is also true for ISO or Eurepgap certification. The concept

Fruit Logistica trends as seen by *FruiTrop*	
Can't get away from them	Citrus, banana, pineapple, mango, avocado
Noticed	Minor tropical fruits
Coming up	A range of melons
Special mention	'Sweet' pineapple varieties have become ordinary
Nothing said	Fresh-cut
Disappeared	Organic
Process in the news	Non-destructive quality analysis
Everyday concepts	Eurepgap, ISO
A modest position	Fair trade
Forgotten concepts	Health, innocuousness
On everybody's lips	Common market organisation of banana

forms part of all the 'normal' features of a fruit or a vegetable. As if in all cases product certification, procedure, quality, origin, etc., were as fundamental as the product itself, but integrated to such an extent that they no longer require highlighting. Using the feature in marketing would be as lacking in information or attraction for a customer as the strict respect of maximum residue limits or product harmlessness. The increasing interest of operators in assurance of the intrinsic quality of produce (sugar, acidity, ripeness, etc.) is nevertheless noted.

A world of fruit and vegetables

Fruit Logistica would clear anybody's doubts as to the globalisation of fresh fruits and vegetables. The internationalisation of trade is tangible. Europeans fill their shopping baskets all over the world. The range goes well beyond the frontiers of the European Union at this kind of event. The major southern origins (Argentina, Chile and Mexico) and the minor ones (Vietnam, Thailand and Ghana), the Mediterranean countries (Morocco, Turkey and Egypt), countries in broader Europe (Spain, Italy, France, Germany and Poland) and even Russia gave the whole a distinctly international flavour. The presence of prospective EU members had been very significant at the last show but now stabilised to a fairly limited number of exhibitors far from proportional to the scale of fruit or vegetable production in these countries. In contrast, the number of visitors increased strongly, seeming to confirm the positions of these countries as importers rather than exporters. This should reassure EU producers, at least in the medium term. Russia's first participation in the event was in no way a failure. The trade operators Sunway and especially JFC made a spectacular entry, thanks to a spacious stand. This is a good illustration of the increasing share of this market in international trade in citrus and banana. A similar observation can be made for exports as the strong development of participation of certain countries clearly indicates their ambitions on the community market. In this respect, Turkey undoubtedly stood out as an emerging country at the show with over 20 stands in 2004 (in comparison with four last year) under the aegis of a dynamic exporters' union. Likewise, Ghana, a rising power in the pineapple market, was no longer represented by SPEG alone but by about ten companies. Another significant feature was the marked increase in the presence of Asian companies. Korea and Vietnam made their début and Chinese participation increased significantly to nearly ten stands. Are these signs of a new era with China playing a major role as exporter in the world fresh fruit and vegetable trade? Production has grown tremendously (an increase of 50 million tonnes in 10 years, that is to say approximately the equivalent of



Quality in the forefront

Although it is technically possible, but not easy, to certify a procedure (crop management sequence, organisation of production, traceability, etc.), it is much more difficult to guarantee the intrinsic quality of fresh produce day after day and year after year throughout a chain that may be long and complex (import chains). It is obvious to say that the physiology of fruit and vegetables depends to a great extent on the climatic conditions at production (their seasonal nature), 'terroirs', types of production and storage, transport and distribution methods, etc. The chain is long and agricultural products are subject to much change and deterioration. Although the list of agricultural chemicals can be fixed and an undertaking made to respect these lists, it is difficult to do likewise with sugar and acidity contents, precise physiological stages, maximum levels of internal defects or storage periods. The sector has sought to reduce uncertainty here for years. This is one of the effects of the considerable weight acquired by supermarket chains in the fruit and vegetable trade. But produce standardisation must not be considered as a further lever for the retail trade to impose its conditions on producers. It makes it possible to guarantee optimum taste features for consumers. Fruit and vegetables are expensive in both the northern and southern countries and there must be guarantees concerning their intrinsic quality. Rapid progress is being made here. Technical solutions are increasingly numerous and more reliable. Non-destructive fruit-by-fruit analytical methods all using near infrared (NIR) should soon become widespread. This is shown by the numerous equipment suppliers with systems covering a broad variety of fruits (including tropical fruits such as pineapple, mango and papaya) attending Fruit Logistica. According to OCAB (*Organisation centrale des producteurs et exportateurs d'ananas et de bananes de Côte d'Ivoire*), a pineapple producer and exporter that has been testing an Italian procedure (SACMI) at departure from Côte d'Ivoire and on arrival in Europe, the commercial results are extremely encouraging.

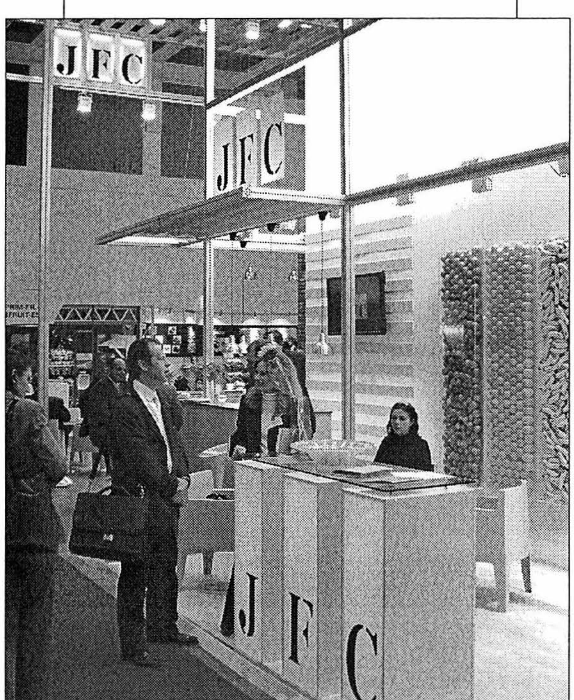
EU production) but seems inadequate to satisfy a domestic market that still has considerable scope for growth.

The major international operators unsurprisingly included the massive presence of Del Monte, Dole, Fyffes and Chiquita.

A waltz of pineapple, banana and melon

The produce in the forefront remained the same, with the pineapple (can't get away from it), banana (omnipresent in political and regulatory concerns) and melon (gaining ground). Each deserves a quick analysis.

Following on from last year, operators continued to work on making extra-sweet pineapple commonplace. It is practically impossible to enumerate all the brands with this pineapple variety. We gave up after counting more than 15. It is now difficult for the leader Del Monte to maintain its lead and stand out as different. There was nothing very new in relation to its star product except for an original ready-prepared product and a new presentation of grades, like clothing sizes (S, L, etc.). Côte d'Ivoire operators, with large quantities of Smooth Cayenne, tend to be satisfied by the fact that their competitor's produce is becoming commonplace. Certain of the taste qualities of their produce and soon to have an improved Smooth Cayenne variety, they hope to re-stimulate customer interest in this variety, regain market shares and above all raise the price of their fruits.



Nothing new in bananas, which remain extremely banal. With a risk of boring everybody, conversations are still centred on the common market organisation of banana (EU enlargement and the tariff only system). Unless you work only with lamb's lettuce from Nantes or Peruvian green asparagus, it is difficult to avoid the discussion, rumours, conjectures and opinions held or passed on concerning bananas. This issue of *FruiTrop* includes a precise update on the situation.

The quest for new produce went via old favourites. Indeed, melon is the up and coming fruit. Sector heavyweights do not hide their interest in it. Del Monte showed the way with a larger display of melon than of its star fruit, pineapple. Galia, Honeydew, Canary—no variety seemed to have been forgotten, except perhaps for those with real sensorial qualities. In any case, other operators—particularly French ones—confirmed that they were developing their ranges of melon.

There was no revolution in citrus fruits either although recently developed easy peeler varieties have graduated from marginal to visible. Israeli exporters showed off their variety Or, a late seedless hybrid that is easy to peel and has excellent taste qualities. In the same category, their Moroccan counterparts promoted Afourer (Murcott), also proving to be a solid component of this market segment. The absence of the Florida Department of Citrus, which handles the promotion of citrus from Florida, confirmed its change of target to the final consumer rather than importers. Was the risk well-calculated? There is no room for error for this origin with the plummeting of the volumes imported by the EU in recent years. In contrast, Argentinian exporters display real ambition on the European market with more than 20 exporters, mainly in the citrus sector, at the show in comparison with just one in 2003.

But what happened to the social clauses?

The man in the street would have been surprised by the obvious lack of interest of trade professionals in the social questions related to the production and marketing of produce. Whereas whispers of initiatives in this respect are world-wide, the sector seems to have closed the file on the question for a while. Except for the presence of Agro Fair and Savid (organic, fair trade bananas), very few operators highlighted the concept of production respecting social minima. We bet that this comparative silence proves that if less is said about the matter, more action is taken in the field. Might the recent decision taken by the Coop, the second largest Swiss distributor in terms of volume, to reference only fair trade bananas be a taste of the future? ■

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