

China and New Zealand add momentum to the development of the kiwifruit industry

12 July 2024 | News

New Zealand kiwifruit originates from China



New Zealand kiwifruit originates from China

China is the world's largest grower of kiwifruit, while New Zealand is the world's largest exporter of kiwifruit. Experts believe that research and innovation in the kiwifruit industry offer immense potential for the two countries to cooperate and better meet the needs for high-quality kiwifruit among Chinese consumers.

China's ever-improving customs clearance process allows kiwifruit to enter the Chinese market more quickly. For example, at the Shanghai Nangang port, where Zespri's freighters frequently dock, Yangshan customs provides convenient clearance measures through advance declaration and other initiatives. Customs officers work around the clock to supervise the unloading and storage of goods, ensuring seamless clearance.

The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), the world's largest free trade deal comprising 10 Association of Southeast Asian Nations countries, as well as China, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand, entered into force on Jan. 1, 2022. This monumental agreement not only underscores the importance of regional economic integration but also highlights the growing interconnectedness of markets. Such developments create a favorable condition for the ongoing cooperation and mutual benefits seen in the kiwifruit trade between China and New Zealand.

Researchers from China's Sichuan province have also independently cultivated a commercially viable red-flesh kiwifruit variety called "Hongyang" after years of efforts, Li said. "Currently, the new variety we developed has obtained variety protection rights in 14 countries and the European Union, and has been authorized for cultivation on more than 3,500

hectares of farmland in countries such as Italy and Chile."

"China has got some fantastic varieties of kiwifruit, particularly the green kiwifruit. They're a little bit sweeter than the New Zealand ones. The red varieties, like Hongyang from Sichuan, are also very tasty," Kinsella said.

The two countries' kiwifruit industries "are very complementary," he said, as New Zealand kiwifruit began arriving in China at the end of March, filling a gap in the market when Chinese kiwifruit is not available.

Growth potential of China market:

Chinese supermarkets sell domestically produced kiwifruit, sometimes called mihoutao by locals, and New Zealand's brand, Zespri kiwifruit. Their oval, brown shape and sweet and tangy taste make them a welcome delicacy for Chinese consumers with refined palates.

However, many people are unaware that New Zealand kiwifruit originates from China. Over a hundred years ago, the fruit embarked on an adventurous journey across the Pacific from China to New Zealand. Its cultivation and development in New Zealand have since become a testament to the enduring bond and friendship between these two nations.

"China is by far the largest country market (of Zespri)," said Ivan Kinsella, Head of Corporate Affairs China at Zespri International, noting that China's imports account for approximately 27% of Zespri's total exports, which should be around 200,000 tons this year.

"This year we will have probably around 23 chartered reefers, or refrigerated vessels, that are 100% with Zespri fruit coming directly from New Zealand to China," he said. Without stopping, it takes about 12 days for the fruit to arrive in the best condition at a number of Chinese ports, including Shanghai, Taizhou and Dongguan, he added.

"With the steady growth of kiwifruit exports to China, Zespri will continue the expansion and consolidation of its supply chain throughout China. Currently, the company has established an offline presence in over 60 cities in China and plans to double the number to 120 over the next five years as economic and trade relations between the two countries continue to flourish," Kinsella said.

Strengthening bilateral cooperation between the two country's

Premier Li Qiang visited the China-New Zealand Belt-and-Road Joint Laboratory on Kiwifruit in Auckland. He said that the laboratories in China and New Zealand complement each other's strengths and collaborate effectively. Through the empowerment of science and technology, the laboratories provide support for the further improvement and upgrading of the kiwifruit industry in both countries, and add momentum to the development of the kiwifruit industry in the Belt and Road countries.

It has facilitated extensive collaboration in kiwifruit germplasm resource development and utilization, industry standardization, food safety and talent cultivation, exploring a path of international cooperation in science and technology and innovation, said Li, who is also a senior researcher at the Sichuan Provincial Academy of Natural Resource Sciences.

China produces more than 2 million tons of kiwifruit annually. In comparison, New Zealand's production is much smaller, estimated at around 700,000 tons this year, said Kinsella. "Despite our smaller industry size, New Zealand has made significant strides in developing the international market."

Expressing hope to provide consumers with a year-round supply of kiwifruit, Kinsella said Zespri is actively exploring the cultivation of kiwifruit in China to leverage the New Zealand growing season in the Southern Hemisphere and the Chinese growing season in the Northern Hemisphere to better serve the Chinese market.