

25 February 2025

## **China presents a remarkable opportunity for the South African avocado industry to flourish**

The arrival of South Africa's first shipment of avocados in Shanghai in October 2024 highlighted a new chapter in agricultural cooperation between South Africa and China. The International Fresh Produce Association (IFPA) hosted a webinar for members on 20 February, featuring South African avocado producers and Chinese market representatives who discussed challenges and opportunities that will shape the future of South Africa's avocado industry.

### **Participants from South Africa:**

Derek Donkin, CEO at Subtrop South Africa

Hans Boyum, commercial director for Africa at Westfalia Fruit

Trevor Dukes, CEO of The Fruit Farm Group

Clive Garrett, Marketing Manager at ZZ2

### **Participants from China:**

Mabel Zhuang, China Country Manager at IFPA

Scott Lu, Senior Product Manager at Dole China

Grace Shi, Vice President at Mr Avocado China

Lifan Yu, Commercial Manager at Halls China

## **OVERVIEW OF SOUTH AFRICAN AVOCADO PRODUCTION**

The Chinese market is still young, although growing at a fair rate of a low base. It is seen as an important market for South African avocados and operators will supply according to the market's growth.

South Africa produces two large avocado groups. The Hass type is the fruit that turns dark on its skin when ripening, and it is best known in the international trade. The green skin cultivars remain green when ripened.

The traditional growing areas are in the northeast of South Africa. But the newer planting areas are down in the eastern and western Cape. The traditional season in the north would be from February to September. In the south, producers can start harvesting in September to December, which means the country can produce almost year-round. Some regions in KwaZulu-Natal and high-lying areas in Limpopo Province can also harvest from September to December.

The commercial avocado plantings in South Africa are estimated at ±20,800 hectares, which calculates to a total production of ±160,000 tonnes per annum. The local avocado production

has been increasing in recent years, with new plantings of about 800 hectares planted annually. South Africa has about 380 commercial avocado growers.

Approximately half of South Africa's avocado production is exported. Most fruit is exported to Europe, the United Kingdom, Russia, Scandinavia, and Eastern Europe, and 3% to other markets. In 2023 and 2024, export markets opened in China, Japan and India.

#### AVOCADO SUPPLYING COUNTRIES TO CHINA

China imports avocados mainly from Peru, with smaller volumes from Chile, Kenya, New Zealand, Mexico and the Philippines. Imports from Tanzania and South Africa only started in the last quarter of 2024 so it's not a full season number yet. South Africa's performance will be seen in the upcoming new season.

#### CONSUMPTION

In 2023, China hit a record of 65,000 tons of avocado imports, but in 2024, this import has slid down to 49,000 tons. This could possibly be a result of China's slowing down economy and the decreased consumption power of consumers. On the other hand, China still needs to develop the demand for avocados as it is relatively new for Chinese consumers. The country has shown great interest in the fruit due to its health and nutritional benefits, especially for families with children. China's growth in fresh avocado consumption is driven mainly by the demand from fruit retail channels and milk tea chain shops.

#### ADVANTAGES FOR SOUTH AFRICAN EXPORTERS

- **TRANSPORTATION**

Ocean containers from South Africa to major ports in China take an average of 22 days. This significantly shorter transit time ensures better arrival quality for South African avocados than those from Peru and Chile, which typically take 40–45 days. However, the recently opened Chancay port in Peru could cut shipping times to China and erode South Africa's logistics advantage.

- **SEASON**

As a premium product in the Chinese market, South African avocados provide a timely alternative to other international suppliers, especially during peak seasons when supply constraints are common. The South African avocado production season begins early, with certain varieties available around week 10. In the Chinese market, between weeks 5 and 18, only limited supplies from Chile's late-season crop and high-altitude regions in Peru are available. This creates a significant opportunity for South African avocados to fill the gap.

- **QUALITY**

So far, South African avocados shipped to China have been praised for their superior quality, excellent taste, and efficient transportation logistics. If these advantages can be upheld with

subsequent shipments, it positions them to perform better in the Chinese retail market compared to Peruvian avocados.

- **DEMAND**

As China's middle class continues to grow and demand for healthy, nutritious food rises, avocados are becoming increasingly popular. South Africa has the advantage of supplying Hass and green skins all year round. The South African avocado industry has a rich background and knowledge that will help to educate the China market and provide more opportunities and options for Chinese customers.

- **CHALLENGES**

South Africa and Peru have overlapping production seasons from May to August, presenting notable challenges. Peru's main season begins in May, bringing a large influx of avocados to the market. While the quality is average, the low prices disrupt market stability, inevitably impacting the demand for South African avocados.

South African avocados are currently required to undergo methyl bromide fumigation before being shipped to China, which can impact quality and add cost.

#### **IFPA SOUTHERN AFRICA MEMBER COMPANIES THAT PRESENTED AT THE WEBINAR**

**Westfalia Fruit** farms are located in major origins, including South Africa, Mozambique, Chile, Colombia, Peru, Portugal, India, and the USA. In October 2024, Westfalia Fruit provided the first consignment of avocados from South Africa, shipped through Durban to Shanghai.

**ZZ2** is the largest single producer of avocados in South Africa. They market under the brand Africado, which is a combination of the words Africa and avocado. ZZ2 is a farming operation that intends to send avocados to China this year through its exporters, Mission and Core.

**The Food Farm Group** is an international company with its head office in Europe. Other operations are in Brazil, Uruguay, Turkey, and South Africa. The Group that owns the Bounty rootstock, works closely with multiple grower partners across production regions, including neighbouring countries, to optimize and enhance supply into the market.

**Halls** China office has worked since 2018 together with its global partners to ensure the quality of avocado in China year-round. They also work with partner service providers in China, selling the hard and green fruit entering the ready-to-eat market. They supply restaurants, retail, and lately the popular bubble tea industry.

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## **ABOUT IFPA**

The International Fresh Produce Association (IFPA) is the largest industry association representing the interests, individuals, and organisations of all sizes and specialities across the global supply chain. We are positioned to serve as a resource and partner for the media, policymakers, and change leaders who are invested in the solutions the industry has the power to provide.

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