

Black currant. Co-operation with processors is essential

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July 25, 2017



What are the impressions of the IBA (International Blackcurrant Association) visit to Poland, held on 27-29 June 2017? How do they perceive the production of blackcurrant in our country against other countries? What should we change in order to improve the situation of producers and raise the price of fruit?

How do you assess what you saw during your visit? What was her purpose?

Anthony Snell, President of IBA: I highly appreciate the visit to Polish plantations, where the conditions of growing black currant are great. It is a unique opportunity for us to evaluate the production of these fruits in a country that is a world leader. IBA's goal is to bring black currant producers worldwide, and to promote the consumption of these fruits by highlighting their benefits (high antioxidants, antioxidants, vitamin C content). We also strive for producers to receive high prices for blackcurrants and to meet the needs of the market. Prices in Poland are too low due to overproduction.

What should be done in Poland to raise the price of fruit?

Anthony Snell: The first thing is the need for greater cooperation between manufacturers, and the next is the co-operation with processors. Fruit production must be planned and based on the contract and the purchase price guarantee. It is important to produce what the market needs, both in terms of product quality and quantity. We see that in Poland today production is at a high level, there are many professional producers, but there is still a large group of producers who have small and unprofessional farms. Here you have to raise standards. If these manufacturers are to supply international companies, they must meet their requirements. It is important that small farms raise the standard of fruit quality (as certified by GlobalG.A.P), to the level of professional, large growers. It is in the UK, France, Denmark or New Zealand where currant producers have to meet high standards of quality to meet market demands. We believe we need to work together more because there is no talk between manufacturers and processors. Nothing should be planted on the plantation until it has been placed on the merchant's premises.



(From left: Stefanie Sharma, Anthony Snell, Dorota Jarret, Jens Pedersen)

How do you rate Polish production against other countries?

Anthony Snell: It is clear that Poland has great soil and climatic conditions for blackcurrant cultivation, but I have not noticed much difference in the way of growing. On the other hand, the main difference for the UK is that the growers produce a currant based on the contract where the particular recipient / market is identified and the amount of black currant that he is obliged to deliver. They work very closely with processors. In this case, if the manufacturer produces more, he will not be able to deliver that surplus to the contract recipient, but only to find another market, possibly leaving the fruit unloaded or reduce the plantings in the next year. There are only 36 manufacturers in the UK who produce 10-12 thousand. black currant, and all have plantations of similar size - 40-50 ha. Each grower knows what fruit prices to expect. Everyone is united at the British Blackcurrant Foundation, and everyone must proportionally fund this fund. This promotes the consumption of black currants.

Stefanie Sharma, General Manager of IBA: The differences between Poland and France are very large. There are fewer varieties in France, with only four in the plantations. They are used for processing, ie production mainly cassis (black currant-based liqueur). The shrubs are half the size of those in Poland, and similarly with the size of the fruit. The yields in our country are much lower and yes, in good years we collect 3-4 t / ha in France. But the prices paid by manufacturers are higher and satisfying. No one will plant more currants than they will be able to sell.

Jens Pedersen, vice president of IBA: It is clear that the yields this year in Poland will be lower than last year. In other European countries it is also expected to decrease the production of black currant this season. The Polish plantations that we visited are well managed and you can see that growers care about production. It can be seen that in Poland and other countries there is a growing threat from pests and diseases of black currant.

Dorota Jarret, breeder with James Hutton Limited: One of the reasons for participating in the plantation visit is the desire to thoroughly investigate what causes such big changes in Poland's production year by year, as well as the need to investigate the profile of varieties in Poland. It can be seen that the greater emphasis in Poland is on agronomy than on quality. This is probably due to a lack of good dialogue between processors and manufacturers. In the west there is greater emphasis on quality and is appreciated by the higher rates paid to producers, for example, for higher levels of sugars in fruits (expressed in brix degrees). Growers choose varieties that will provide the right quality of fruit. In Poland, heavy winters and spring frosts affect yield variations. Growers do it as far as possible, but if they do not get

the right rates for the fruits they can not invest. Of course, the quality of the crop depends largely on the varieties, but now it is most important for Polish producers to have those varieties that are better off in terms of agronomic quality, and the recipients of the fruit do not encourage them to invest in fruit quality. In addition, there are many currant products in Poland, so there is not as much demand for raw materials. It is important that producers buy seedlings from licensed nurseries. It is not just about paying the license, or transferring money for further development of the breeding work, but also to get a good start in cultivating currants on the plantation, ie greater plant vigor and higher yields. In the UK, growers do not breed the seedlings themselves, and the nurseries' plans are far from productive to minimize the flow of pests and diseases.

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What are the trends in black currant breeding now in the West?

Dorota Jarret: A lot of emphasis is put on fruit flavor, sugar content (Brix) and color, including its stability. It is about the production of the raw material that will allow the amount of added sugar in the currants to stabilize the final product. In the UK breeding programs are being developed, where blackcurrant club varieties are produced, such as Ribena (juice and currant brands).

What do you think is important for black currant promotion?

Stefanie Sharma: The promotion of blackcurrant is promoting the health benefits of these fruits, but also promoting high standards in production. It is the quality of the fruit that underlies the high quality of the final product (juices).

Anthony Snell: We think that national associations should promote the consumption of blackcurrant in each country. Manufacturers should make up campaigns. The industry itself must invest in cooperation and promotion. It can not be limited to the production of fruit. We should all be involved in increasing the consumption of black currant in the world, because it is a unique superpower, but one that every consumer can afford.

We invite Polish black currant producers to take part in the IBA conference on 6-9 June 2018 in Angers, France, where producers from around the world will eat.