

Meeting summary

20 May 2021

A meeting of the pip fruit sub-group of the Fruit and Vegetables Market Observatory (F&V MO) took place on 20 May 2021.

The first item for discussion was the overall market situation for pip fruit outside the EU.

Experts provided a very complete and detailed overview on production capacity and trade trends per world region.

The macro-regions covered were: Southern Hemisphere, Ukraine/Moldova, Serbia and Balkans, Russia, Central Asia, Turkey, India, Iran, China, North America. Some EU producers had raised concerns about new plantings in the EU neighbourhood (potential 11-14 million tonnes, out of more than 65 million tonnes). Therefore it was useful to discuss the world context at large to put each region's capacity in context.

On the EU situation, experts took stock of the last campaign, discussed the current context and provided some high-level indications on the upcoming 2021 harvest.

The 2020 EU apple crop was at 10.6 million tonnes, 1% lower than the previous year, 4% below the 3-year average, with Spain, Portugal, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Austria and Hungary seeing lower crops. The 2020 pear crop was at 2.3 million tonnes, 14% higher than average, after a lower crop the previous year.

As of April 2021, apple stocks were high in Poland and Italy, but lower in France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Spain. Sales were slightly lower than the previous year at same time, but volumes handled in 2020 were high with the COVID lockdown. Stocks in the main producing countries are expected to be cleared by June/early July, by August in Poland. Lower summer fruit crop (stone fruit) should play a role in clearing apple stocks.

As regards apple and pear trade, experts noted that the impact of the COVID pandemic was clearly visible, with the highest volume of pip fruit shipped intra-EU in spring 2020 and the lowest exported volume outside the EU for the start of this season (September-December 2020) compared to the previous 5 years average (-40%).

Experts briefly discussed the impact of April cold wave on the incoming crop. Evaluation was still ongoing, no quantitative estimation was available yet, but fruit damages were significant in Southern and Central Europe, yet more on other fruit like stone fruit. Depending on the qualitative situation of the fruit when harvested, it might affect the ratio fresh market/processing. Experts agreed that it was too early to have an estimate of the impact and that there will be a regular monitoring of the situation.

Experts from the wholesale sector shared some insights on the fruit and vegetable market in the EU from their point of view. They noted that the impact of Brexit on fruit and vegetables differed from one Member State to the other, with Spain and Italy being more exposed as they export large amounts of fruit to the United Kingdom. Regarding the impact of the COVID pandemic, experts remarked that the EU food markets were still facing bottlenecks with imbalance in surplus disposal, lacking financial resources and modern infrastructures, market uncertainties and staff still exposed to the virus. The wholesale sector was generally able to adapt to the demand shift toward merchant sales versus food services, so the shock was cushioned in a way.

The next meeting of the pip fruit sub-group of the Fruit and Vegetables Market Observatory (F&V MO) is foreseen on 10 September 2021.