

REPORT

—Sorting and grading



LEFT—MAF Roda's Berryway-Berryscan electronic grader used by Camposol in Peru for sorting and selecting blueberries

Demand rising for MAF Roda solutions

VALENCIA—The surge in blueberry production in places like Peru and growing demand for high-quality fruit are good news for MAF Roda's high-tech grading machines.

by Tom Joyce

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The enormous growth in blueberry production being witnessed in Peru has boosted demand for the high-tech automated machinery supplied by Montauban, France-based MAF Roda. Demand for longer shelf-life and higher quality are also encouraging many exporters to upgrade their packing lines in order to better satisfy both customers and consumers.

"We have installed some new blueberry lines for Camposol in Peru," says Christophe Blanc, general manager of Roda Iberica, MAF Roda's subsidiary in Valencia, Spain. "In 2018, we sold the company two complete 18-lane sizers, and this summer we delivered a further four new machines. The lines include grading systems to detect the quality of the fruit, both external and internal, since firmness is crucial for high-quality blueberries."

According to Blanc, it was especially important for Camposol that the blueberry line did not remove the fruit's natural coating, known as the bloom, which serves as a natural protection and increases the fruit's shelf-life. "We had a number of meetings with representatives from Camposol last year in order to discuss how we could improve the machines," he says. "Maintaining the bloom was an important requirement. For blueberries exported to China it is absolutely essential. In order to keep the bloom we decided on a fast and efficient cleaning and drying system."

Camposol's lines will also feature MAF Roda's new Insight system, which uses near-infrared spectroscopy to measure the Brix of the fruit. "This is the first Insight system that we will sell," says Blanc. "The second one we are selling to Hortifruit in Chile. It is a new technology. There is no one else offering this on the market. We conducted tests in our laboratory and the results were very positive."

According to Blanc, Camposol was looking for just such a system to gauge the sugar content of its fruit. "Sometimes our customers ask for particular things, like sensors for Brix," he says. "Sometimes we have certain ideas of our own, such as improvements to how the fruit rotates during sorting. It is a collaborative effort with our partners and helps improve the efficiency of the machines so we can all do a better job."

The internal quality of blueberries has become a more important requirement than in the past, reveals Blanc. "Using near-infrared lighting, we can look inside the fruit to check the firmness," he explains. "We can do two to three different grades of firmness so an exporter like Camposol can determine whether the fruit should be sent to the US or China, for example. External checks include identifying scars on the fruit or splitting of the skin. We do a very good job thanks to the scanning system we developed two years ago using new technology and advanced cameras. This is the difference between MAF Roda and other companies."

However, it is not just in South America that demand is growing for blueberry sorting machines, but also in South Africa. "Exporters in South Africa are upgrading their lines," says Blanc. "We are just about to ship a new line to one of our customers. In the past all their facilities used weighing machines, but these were damaging the fruits, so they are now choosing punnet fillers that are more gentle on the fruit." **B**