

REPORT
—Italian lemons

Amalfi lemons serve up slice of la dolce vita

NAPLES —Lemon growers on Italy's Amalfi coast are looking for new export openings.

by Chris White

Lemons grown on one of Italy's most beautiful coastlines are going to be making more of impact on export markets in coming seasons as growers seek out shoppers who are better able to pay the high prices that their quality produce can command.

"Amalfi lemons are renowned all over the world," explains Elvio Ruocco, general manager of Lemon Sud. "They've always been very highly prized here in Italy, and it's high time that shoppers elsewhere had the chance to enjoy them too."

Lemons have been grown on the Amalfi coast south of Naples for centuries. They are grown up the side of the steep hillsides that hug the coastline and guarantee maximum sunshine and a unique, sweet flavour. The region, which now attracts tourists from all over the world who come to enjoy the dramatic coastline as well as the islands of Capri and Ischia, has secured protected IGP status under the name "Limone Costa d'Amalfi IGP".

It was Ruocco's great grandfather who started Lemon Sud at end of the 19th century, exporting their first lemons as far as the UK and United States. The company says it now supplies some 8,000 tonnes of lemons annually to buyers in Italy and abroad.

"Supermarket buyers in France, Denmark, Germany, the UK, and even in Lithuania are now stocking Amalfi lemons," explains Ruocco. Lemon Sud is a member of the Mediterraneo Group, a network of companies that is linked to Apofruit, one of Italy's largest fresh produce cooperatives and a leading global exporter.

"Yes, there's good potential to develop export sales of Amalfi lemons," says Ilenio Bastoni, commercial director of Apofruit, which sells Lemon Sud's fruit through its wide-ranging distribution network.



THE FIELD

LEFT — Lemon Sud exports its prized lemons to key markets in Italy and the rest of Europe

BELOW — Elvio Ruocco's great grandfather set up the business

"Amalfi lemons command high prices, a factor which sustains our industry in view of our higher costs of production"

"But the crisis here in Italy means we must maximise our efforts to find new customers abroad," explains Ruocco. "Amalfi lemons command high prices, a factor which sustains our industry in view of our higher costs of production. And improved growing and harvesting techniques mean that we can supply lemons throughout the year. It opens up opportunities to us to keep buyers supplied on export markets."

The excellent climate means that Amalfi lemons tend to be on the large side. They are grown not only for their juice content but also for their flesh, which can be

used in all kinds of way, including for medicinal purposes.

Amalfi lemons offer an opportunity to extend the lemon category with a high-value product that is full of provenance and those other characteristics that offer a significant point of difference to the standard lemon lines that supermarkets offer nowadays. **E**

