

# A SPANISH ADVENTURE

*Two former Redbridge employees have set up a new business supplying a wide range of Spanish produce to the UK. Michael Barker finds out more*

**A** fledgling business is offering Spanish growers a new route to the UK market.

Fresh Venture was formed just a year ago in Almería by Tom Fisher and Hortensia Sanchez Aguilera, two veterans of the UK fresh produce trade who decided to set up their own company supplying the wholesale, food-service and catering trade.

Fisher started out working for Redbridge at Bristol Wholesale Market, before moving to Redbridge Produce Marketing where he met Sanchez Aguilera. The two moved to Spain in 2013, joining Vitacress and working in its imports division. From there, they decided to set up their own business, with Fisher focusing primarily on sales and Sanchez Aguilera on procurement and general management.

The company is specialising in salads – the full range of tomatoes, plus cucumbers, peppers, aubergines and more – from Almería, as well as outdoor crops such as lettuce, celery, cauliflower and broccoli from Murcia. Then there's fruit in the shape of stone-fruit from Murcia and cherries from Jerte, making up a wide portfolio of product.

In its first year in operation, Fresh Venture shipped some 900,000 packages from Spain to the UK, where they were sold on markets including Western International, Bristol, Birmingham, Bradford, Manchester, Liverpool, Hull, Glasgow and Southampton.



The company is aiming for steady growth rather than trying to run before it can walk, according to Fisher, with customer service more important. “Our business model is working closely with our growers to source the best-quality produce in the most cost-effective way,” he explains. “This gives our customers a great-value product as we understand the competitiveness of the market nowadays.”

While not discounting the multiple retail or any other sector as a future market, Fisher believes the foodservice and wholesale side is “very exciting” at the moment, despite some knock-on effects on pricing as a result of the supermarket price war. He also says it is important to support those customers who were with them from the start, and would rather supply more to one customer than a little to a wide range on the same wholesale market.

So far the UK has been the only destination market for Fresh Venture's products, but they are already looking at other parts of Europe and the Middle East as potential for expansion.



Tom Fisher and Hortensia Sanchez Aguilera

The backdrop of Brexit makes it arguably an unfortunate time for a Brit to be starting an export business in Spain, but Fisher is upbeat, insisting that “nobody really knows what will happen” and that if Brexit results in fewer traders choosing to operate in the market, that can only be good for Fresh Venture.

And with Spain certain to remain top of the list of fresh produce suppliers to the UK, the future should be bright for the new business. — **FPJ**