

**PMAC weekly update 19th to the 26th March**

1. **Government agencies**: Xylella fastidiosa Priority Actions Workshop; Visit from Japan Ministry of Agriculture; Myrtle rust found for first time in Manawatu; WTO Notifications; WCO3 Mandatory Date - only three months to go.
2. **New Zealand News:**  Announcement of new High Commissioner to Niue; Pilot programme to combat codling moth gives spectacular results; Tauranga research institute to open this year; New Zealand Company creates robots for horticulture; Kiwifruit industry needs to spend $1 billion to keep up with demand; T&G sells fruit processing branch; Kumara worries: Growers battle wet weather; The apple varieties putting the focus back into taste; NZ kiwano now shipping direct to US east coast; Enormous kiwifruit property portfolio for sale; Jones says irrigation adds up; New Zealand temperatures relatively high over last 14 months
3. **International news:** GAIN reports; China responds to Trump tariffs ; US approves irradiation treatment for Peruvian blueberries; EC approves Bayer’s proposed acquisition of Monsanto; African nations sign largest free trade agreement since start WTO; Chilean blues smash shipment record; Maersk Line relaunches Asia-Europe Network to increase schedule reliability; 2018 Fruit and Vegetable trends; Australian fruit and nut exports to China up 500% in last four years; Walmart China Emphasizes Fresh Goods and Ecommerce for 2018; Construction starts on Asia's largest cross-border agricultural products cold-chain logistic centre; Victims of Australian listeria outbreak could make range of claims; Listeria outbreak: Sixth person dies in NSW; Produce industry keeping tabs on blockchain

***Editors comments***

*An as steady as she goes collection of articles this week. New technologies that will affect horticulture into the future are prevalent this week with research into these technologies being progressed domestically in the Bay of Plenty. Robotic plus have already successfully developed a couple of technologies and a new research centre has been set up in Tauranga to provide horticultural tools and systems. In the international section Walmart is embracing the digital world with news that it is moving aggressively into online shopping in China and progressing a significant blockchain project in America.*

*For articles on more immediate happenings it is interesting to see articles and gain reports on China and the EU’s response to Trumps new tariffs. Thankfully both responses are considered. In the food safety world there is welcome news that the Listeria outbreak in Australia looks as though it has come to an end. Unfortunately for the Industry despite the re-opening of markets unsold melons are being destroyed and there is the possibility of legal claims against the grower.*

1. **Agency news**



* 1. **Xylella fastidiosa Priority Actions Workshop**

MPI attended the *Xylella fastidiosa* Priority Actions Workshop in Canberra on 15 February. The workshop was organised by the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources (DAWR) The purpose of the workshop was to consider the priority actions from the earlier symposium, and to plan implementation of a national approach to further enhance Australia’s capacity to prevent X*. fastidiosa* entering the country and to prepare for a response. One of the outcomes from the workshop was that Australia will form a national steering group on *X. fastidiosa* and employ a full time co-ordinator; subsequently MPI representation on the steering group is going to be arranged.

* 1. **Visit from Japan Ministry of Agriculture**

MPI and the industries lead by Kiwifruit Vine Health (KVH) hosted Japan Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) for the kiwifruit pollen access to Japan on February 19-23, 2018.

The Japanese officials visited New Zealand to learn the PSA-V (Pseudomonas syringae pv. actinidiae) diagnostics on kiwifruit pollen and to understand New Zealand management in keeping South Island PSA-V free.

This is following the false positive result of PCR testing conducted in Japan on an export consignment in April 2017. The hosting included a visit at MPI-Plant Health and Environment Laboratory in Auckland, Kiwifruit Vine Health (KVH) office in Tauranga, kiwifruit orchards and pollen mills both in Tauranga and Nelson. The Japanese found the engagement extremely helpful and has strengthened the working relationship on trade of kiwifruit pollen to Japan.

* 1. **Myrtle rust found for first time in Manawatu**

Last week MPI confirmed myrtle rust has been detected in Manawatu for the first time. The fungus was found on a young ramarama (Lophomyrtus) in a planted area off Victoria Esplanade in Palmerston North.

 MPI said "Hopefully, we have found it in this region early, which would give us a chance of trying to eliminate it or, at least, slow down the spread there. ….. It is disheartening that myrtle rust has been detected in another region, but it is consistent with the expected infection pattern. "

At 19 March, there have been a total of 409 properties affected by myrtle rust on mainland New Zealand: Northland (4 properties), Auckland (63), Waikato (33), Bay of Plenty (92), Taranaki (200), Manawatu (1) and Wellington (16). In the last couple of weeks, most detections have been in Taranaki and Auckland. There have been no detections in the South Island to date, although north-western areas were identified in climate modelling of being at a high risk from spores carried on the wind from Australia. [Full article available here](http://mpi.govt.nz/news-and-resources/media-releases/myrtle-rust-found-for-first-time-in-manawatu/http%3A/mpi.govt.nz/feedback-form/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank)

* 1. **WTO Notifications**

Please find attached the most recent WTO notifications from countries that are considering changes to their plant import requirements for specific products. If you have any concerns about the notifications being presented please contact Plant.exports@mpi.govt.nz so that they can potentially make a submission to the notifying country. Changes notified over the last week include:

* China – a national standard for ready to eat fresh cut fruit and vegetables
* USA- MRL’s

The embedded files for the last weeks(which has links through to the original notifications)is available here 

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* 1. **WCO3 Mandatory Date - only three months to go**

The 1 July 2018 mandatory date for adopting the WCO3-format cargo reporting and clearance messages is only three months away.  All submitters should be using the WCO3 messages, or have a clear plan for switching over before the deadline.  This update provides details on what you need to do. [Full article available here](https://www.customs.govt.nz/business/trade-single-window/latest-news/tsw-mandatory-date/)



1. **New Zealand News**



* 1. **Announcement of new High Commissioner to Niue**

Foreign Affairs Minister Winston Peters last week announced the appointment of Kirk Yates as High Commissioner to Niue. Kirk Yates is currently Agriculture Development Manager at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade and has held diplomatic and development positions in Indonesia, Fiji and Papua [New Guinea. Full article available here](https://beehive.govt.nz/release/announcement-new-high-commissioner-niue)

**General**

* 1. **Pilot programme to combat codling moth gives spectacular results**

A pilot programme byPlant & Food Research to collapse the population of one of New Zealand’s most harmful apple pests, the codling moth, has produced spectacular results. Each week thousands of sterile codling moths are being released into Central Hawke’s Bay apple orchards to mate with the local population – the key being no new moth babies are produced from these relationships.

The sterile moths have the same drive to mate, yet no progeny result. By overwhelming the local codling moth population with the sterile moths, imported from a production facility in Canada, the wild moth populations have collapsed.

Of particular importance to the programme is the method for releasing the sterile insects. An unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV), following GPS coordinates, is fitted with special pods that release 20,000 sterile moths over 100 hectares of orchard during a flight of just 10 minutes. These releases mean there may be up to 200 sterile moths for every fertile moth present in the treated orchards.

“We’ve seen dramatic results across the 400 hectares of Central Hawke’s Bay orchards treated with these sterile moths, up to 98% reduction of the wild moth populations,” says Plant & Food Research scientist Dr Jim Walker. “Within two seasons we expect the codling moth population will be eliminated from these orchards.” [Full article available here](http://www.freshplaza.com/article/191669/Pilot-programme-to-combat-codling-moth-gives-spectacular-results)

More than 20 scientists from across the globe gathered in New Zealand last week to discuss the sterile insect technique. The working group is supported by the Joint Division of FAO and the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna, which coordinates global efforts in this area. [Full article available here](https://www.plantandfood.co.nz/page/news/media-release/story/scientists-discuss-sex-less-insects/?utm_source=Plant+%26+Food+Research+E-Newsletter&utm_campaign=2157570ef3-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_02_11&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_5919b8ee23-2157570ef3-21882009)

* 1. **Tauranga research institute to open this year**

If everything goes according to plan, a new, multimillion-dollar horticulture-focused regional research institute will be operational in Tauranga during the second half of 2018. Last July, the New Zealand government announced it would provide $8.42 million in funding towards the institute over five years. There will also be additional funding from the industry.

The business case was put forward by Priority One -Western Bay's economic development agency- alongside the University of Waikato and a consortium of eight local companies with the working name PlantTech.

The institute will have a permanent staff of about ten scientists and researchers. It will produce cutting-edge research around the application of digital technologies to industries in and around horticulture, ranging from sensors and data to automation. The organisation's key research themes are in data integration and analytics, autonomous devices and vehicles and point-of-use decision support tools. [Full article available here](http://www.freshplaza.com/article/191355/New-Zealand-Tauranga-research-institute-to-open-this-year)

**Industry news**

* 1. **New Zealand Company creates robots for horticulture**

The Tauranga-based company Robotics Plus believes the time is ripe for innovative automation in the horticultural industry. One of the new concepts it has created is the QuadDuster, a quadbike-based kiwifruit pollination system. The QuadDuster system was developed to improve pollination of kiwifruit, allowing for the even distribution of dry pollen into the vine canopy. The entire system is electronically controlled. This includes pollen dispenser monitoring to ensure consistent delivery, set-speed cruise control on the quad bikes and GPS tracking to show the orchardist where the bikes have been. In 2015, QuadDusters were used in about 25% of New Zealand’s kiwifruit industry, and this is set to grow.

Another Robotics Plus product is the Robotic Apple Packing Cell. In the 2015 season, it packed 1.47 million apples and proved efficient, with more consistent quality presentation than was achieved by people. Growers involved in the preliminary trials were very pleased. The commercial trials will deploy six robot cells. In standard industry packhouses the system packs 120 apples per minute, orienting the fruit so all of the stems are lying horizontal in the trays and pointing in the same direction, all while having the colour side of the apple facing up for optimum presentation. One robot does the work of two to three people. The robot uses pneumatics (suction cups) to handle the fruit. This is gentle and ensures that no human hands touch the fruit during packing, reducing contamination issues. [Full article available here](http://www.freshplaza.com/article/191407/New-Zealand-company-creates-robots-for-horticulture)

* 1. **Kiwifruit industry needs to spend $1 billion to keep up with demand**

The industry that handles kiwifruit after they're harvested will have to start investing heavily in order to keep pace with Zespri's ambitious outlook for exports. Experts give a number of $1 billion.

Zespri, which markets most of New Zealand's export kiwifruit crop, expects demand will result in it doubling annual sales to $4.5 billion by 2025, just seven years away. That means more infrastructure is necessary to handle the bigger harvest.

Zespri chief executive Daniel Mathieson said two of the biggest challenges facing the industry in meeting the projected consumer demand were having enough infrastructures, such as packhouses and coolstores, and enough labour. "But we have a very confident post-harvest sector. They are talking about $1b of investment in the sector to have enough cool storage ability and enough packing lines to pack the increased volumes." [Full article available here](http://www.freshplaza.com/article/191406/New-Zealand-Kiwifruit-industry-needs-to-spend-1-billion-to-keep-up-with-demand)

* 1. **T&G sells fruit processing branch**

T&G Global is selling its subsidiary, ENZA Foods New Zealand Limited, to Cedenco Foods New Zealand Limited. The two companies have reached an agreement about this. This means T&G will sell its fruit processing branch. Cedenco will take over the company in its entirety. This includes the employees and the company's assets in Hastings and Nelson, both in New Zealand. In addition, Cedenco has signed a long-term lease agreement for ENZA Food’s properties in Hastings. T&G's top fruit branch has also made a long-term deal regarding the supply of top fruit for processing. The sale must be finalised on 20 April. Until then, all activities will remain part of T&G.

T&G has also signed an agreement for the sale of the small pouch format assets in Nelson to NZ Apple Products Limited. The company has entered into a three-year lease contact with NZ Apple Products Limited in Nelson.  Negotiations are also underway regarding the apple juice concentrate facility in the same town. T&G expects to be able to have a definite answer in the near future. [Full article available here](http://www.freshplaza.com/article/191560/T-and-G-sells-fruit-processing-branch)

**Crop news**

* 1. **Kumara worries: Growers battle wet weather**

Northland kumara growers were worried about possible crop losses due to the extremely wet summer. The weather caused prices to increase to around $9 per kilogram, and Kaipara Kumara Manager, Anthony Blundell, said that so far only 15 percent of the crop had been harvested and some growers believed this was the wettest summer in over twenty years. He noted that they hoped the weather did not get too much wetter as it would cause unfavourable harvesting conditions, affecting the quality and storing ability of the kumara. Mr Blundell added that the industry was trying to harvest as much of the crop as possible to prevent steep price increases. [Full article available here](https://www.radionz.co.nz/news/country/352581/kumara-worries-growers-battle-wet-weather)

* 1. **The apple varieties putting the focus back into taste**

As Royal Gala apples took off in the 1980’s, New Zealand orchardist Bill Lynch noticed that visual appeal became more important to growers than taste - so he set about changing that.

While Fashion Foods Ltd is yet to commercialise, the company will undertake final marketing trials on two new varieties that were selected specifically to recover notable flavour loss. The varieties known as Berica and Mondaju were chosen from over 1000 Royal Gala variants.

Fashion Foods are the owners of the plant material and prepared brands and have 10,000 trees in a trial on their own orchards, and some test trees in other interested geographical locations. Having now completed exhaustive growing trials over a long time the plan is to seek suitable global partners throughout the year and be ready to license production and marketing, as production volume rises over the next year or two. [Full article available here](http://www.freshplaza.com/special-article/191296/NZ-The-apple-varieties-putting-the-focus-back-into-taste)

* 1. **NZ kiwano now shipping direct to US east coast**

New Zealand Kiwano grower Enzed Exotics is beginning shipments direct to the US East Coast for the first time. Relationships formed at The New York Produce Show in December have enabled the Bay of Plenty growers to establish a shipping base in Philadelphia.

The season has already seen high demand for Enzed Exotics’ Kiwano, though wet and humid late summer conditions means hopes for a record yield may not be achieved. The company said demand for high-quality produce that could demonstrate its sustainable and ethical credentials was growing rapidly. [Full article available here](http://www.freshplaza.com/special-article/190985/NZ-kiwano-now-shipping-direct-to-US-east-coast)

**Other**

* 1. **Enormous kiwifruit property portfolio for sale**

Three kiwifruit orchards, owned by Matai Pacific Ltd and representing one of the country's largest privately owned portfolios, are being sold by tender. The blocks at Te Puke in the Bay of Plenty comprise about 98 canopy hectares with an estimated production of 1.2 million-1.3 million trays of SunGold G3 and Hayward kiwifruit varieties. [Full article available here](http://www.freshplaza.com/article/191303/New-Zealand-Enormous-kiwifruit-property-portfolio-for-sale)

* 1. **Jones says irrigation adds up**

Despite strong anti-irrigation rhetoric from certain parts of the new coalition Government, it appears Crown funding of new irrigation schemes is not entirely off the agenda. Regional Economic Development Minister Shane Jones says irrigation is essential to the growth of the regions. When the $1 billion a year Provincial Growth Fund (PGF) was launched in Gisborne last month, Jones said the Government would no longer support ‘uber mega’ irrigation schemes. However, in an interview with the Rural Exchange (REX) radio show, Jones indicated that irrigation schemes were still an important part of his plans for the fund.  “We identified that irrigation is essential to the growth of a lot of our regions,” Jones says. He added that while dropping large irrigation schemes was no longer on the Government’s agenda, “there remains some wiggle room within the fund to pursue better water management and water storage”.

Meanwhile, in what could be seen as a slight at some of his coalition partners’ anti-irrigation rhetoric, Jones caustically dismissed these criticisms. “For areas such as the Hawkes Bay and Northland without better water storage and management – I am beggared if I can see what we can do with that land.” [Full article available here](https://www.ruralnewsgroup.co.nz/rural-news/rural-general-news/irrigation-adds-up-jones?utm_source=Rural+News+Group+Weekly+E-Newsletter&utm_campaign=86f252cddf-Rural_News_Group_Bulletin_16_January_2018&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_fb79f8bfe8-86f252cddf-59798541&ct=t(Rural_News_Group_Bulletin_16_January_2018))

* 1. **New Zealand temperatures relatively high over last 14 months**

Those in the know say New Zealand hasn't had a below average temperature since January last year. This is factually a 14 month-period of time and labelled "pretty exceptional" by Niwa meteorologist Ben Noll.

He claims these temperatures could be attributed to an increase in northerly winds, bringing warm air from the tropics and sub-tropics. This air increased the temperature of New Zealand's seawater, which in turn directly impacted the country's on-shore climate. According to Noll, New Zealand's produce could be impacted if the hot weather continues. "In the decades to come it could mean evolving patterns of where we grow our crops such as kiwifruit and avocados, some areas becoming more likely to see growth [such as] southern areas of New Zealand," he said. [Full article available here](http://www.freshplaza.com/article/191414/New-Zealand-temperatures-relatively-high-over-last-14-months)



1. **International news**

**Comment**

* 1. **GAIN reports**

Gain reports are from the “Global Agricultural Information Network” and are produced by the USDA. They are designed to provide timely information on the economy, products and issues in foreign countries that are likely to have an impact on United States agricultural production and trade. The information in them is written for USA exporters but the majority is equally relevant to New Zealand. With regard to import regulations for a particular market New Zealand exporters should first check the countries ICPR on MPI’s web site. These are collated specifically for New Zealand product. However the Gain reports often provide additional information that is useful e.g. on grading and labelling, economic profiles. This week see:

1. **Brussels Commission launches consultation on U.S. steel tariff hike** EU Trade Commissioner Malmstrom has asserted that the EU should be excluded from additional tariffs on U.S. imports of steel and aluminium scheduled to be applied from March 23, 2018. However, if the EU were not to be exempt, the European Commission has prepared wide ranging retaliatory measures that include agriculture. [Commission launches consultation on U.S. steel tariff hike\_Brussels USEU\_EU-28\_3-19-2018](http://gain.fas.usda.gov/Recent%20GAIN%20Publications/Commission%20launches%20consultation%20on%20U.S.%20steel%20tariff%20hike_Brussels%20USEU_EU-28_3-19-2018.pdf)
2. **China Notifies Draft Maximum Residue Limits for Pesticides in Food** On February 19, 2018, China notified the WTO of draft standards on maximum residue limits (MRLs) for the residues 107 pesticide, as SPS/N/CHN/1065. The following report contains an unofficial translation of this draft standard.
[China Notifies Draft Maximum Residue Limits for Pesticides in Food \_Beijing\_China - Peoples Republic of\_3-20-2018](http://gain.fas.usda.gov/Recent%20GAIN%20Publications/China%20Notifies%20Draft%20Maximum%20Residue%20Limits%20for%20Pesticides%20in%20Food%20_Beijing_China%20-%20Peoples%20Republic%20of_3-20-2018.pdf)
3. **China Targets U.S. Agriculture in Response to U.S. Trade Actions|Trade Policy Monitoring**On March 23, 2018, the People’s Republic of China’s Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM) announced a proposal to levy retaliatory tariffs impacting approximately $2.0 billion in U.S. food and agricultural exports to China in response to the recent U.S. 232 Trade Action on steel and aluminium.  The products subject to this proposed increase in tariffs include pork and pork products, horticultural products, wine, American ginseng, and denatured ethanol.  [China Targets U.S. Agriculture in Response to U.S. Trade Actions\_Beijing\_China - Peoples Republic of\_3-23-2018](http://gain.fas.usda.gov/Recent%20GAIN%20Publications/China%20Targets%20U.S.%20Agriculture%20in%20Response%20to%20U.S.%20Trade%20Actions_Beijing_China%20-%20Peoples%20Republic%20of_3-23-2018.pdf)
4. **China Released the Food Safety Standard of Pathogen Limit for Foods** On December 26, 2013, the National Health and Family Planning Commission (NHFPC) released the national food safety standard of Pathogen Limits for Foods.  The Standard was implemented on July 1, 2014.  This report provides an unofficial translation of the Standard. [China Released the Food Safety Standard of Pathogen Limit for Foods\_Beijing\_China - Peoples Republic of\_3-13-2018](http://gain.fas.usda.gov/Recent%20GAIN%20Publications/China%20Released%20the%20Food%20Safety%20Standard%20of%20Pathogen%20Limit%20for%20Foods_Beijing_China%20-%20Peoples%20Republic%20of_3-13-2018.pdf)
5. **Japan Set to Modify its GE Food Labelling System**. The committee also suggested the term “Non-GE” now only be allowed when GE is non-detectable ...
[Japan Set to Modify its GE Food Labeling System\_Tokyo\_Japan\_3-20-2018](http://gain.fas.usda.gov/Recent%20GAIN%20Publications/Japan%20Set%20to%20Modify%20its%20GE%20Food%20Labeling%20System_Tokyo_Japan_3-20-2018.pdf)
6. **Senegal Exporter Guide** According to the World Bank, Senegal is one of the strongest economies in West Africa, with an annual gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate of over six percent over the last three years. [Exporter Guide\_Dakar\_Senegal\_3-14-2018](http://gain.fas.usda.gov/Recent%20GAIN%20Publications/Exporter%20Guide_Dakar_Senegal_3-14-2018.pdf)

**Regulatory**

* 1. **China responds to Trump tariffs**

China, the world's second-largest economy has responded to President Trump's controversial trade tariffs. Their Commerce Ministry proposed a list of 128 U.S. products as potential retaliation targets, according to a statement on its website. The U.S. goods, which had an import value of $3 billion in 2017, include wine, fresh fruit, dried fruit and nuts, steel pipes, modified ethanol, and ginseng. U.S. agricultural products, particularly soybeans, have been flagged as the biggest area of potential retaliation by Chinese President Xi Jinping's administration.

Beijing will take measures against the 128 U.S. goods in two stages if it cannot reach an agreement with Washington, the ministry said, adding that it could take legal action under World Trade Organization rules. [Full article available here](http://www.freshplaza.com/article/191640/China-responds-to-Trump-tariffs)

China's Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM) [responded to a US government announcement of tariffs on certain Chinese goods](https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2018/03/22/trump-proposes-tariffs-unnamed-chinese-ense-cjhitarfiforders-tarfiffs-offpoints-finger-china-over-tr/448446002/) by publishing on its website a [statement](http://www.mofcom.gov.cn/article/au/ao/201803/20180302722670.shtml) and [list of US products](http://images.mofcom.gov.cn/www/201803/20180323070002975.pdf) on which it was proposing to levy retaliatory tariffs. A large segment of the MOFCOM list of 128 products is taken up by fresh fruits, dried fruits and nuts. The proposed 15% tariff will apply to all US fresh fruits that currently have market access to be imported into China.

According to the USDA's Agricultural Trade Office, the U.S. exported $19.6b worth of agricultural goods to China last year, making it the second largest market for US agricultural product exports in 2017. (Including $225.8m in fresh fruit). [Full article available here](http://www.producereport.com/article/breaking-china-proposes-15-tariff-most-us-fresh-fruits-dried-fruits-nuts)

* 1. **US approves irradiation treatment for Peruvian blueberries**

Peruvian blueberry exporters shipping to the US now have a new treatment option available to mitigate for fruit flies, after US authorities decided to allow the fruit to be irradiated. The US Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) said the treatment would be allowed as an alternative to cold treatment or fumigation with methyl bromide. [Full article available](https://www.freshfruitportal.com/news/2018/03/14/u-s-approves-irradiation-treatment-peruvian-blueberries/)

* 1. **EC approves Bayer’s proposed acquisition of Monsanto**

Last week the European Commission conditionally approved Bayer’s proposed acquisition of Monsanto. The conditions cover in particular the divestment of certain Bayer businesses, including the greenhouse vegetable breeding department Nunhems. The conditions also covers the divestment of certain Bayer businesses, including the global field crop seeds business such as canola, cotton, and soybean (with minor exceptions restricted to the Asia region), the R&D platform for hybrid wheat, the global vegetable seeds business, the global glufosinate ammonium business as well as certain glyphosate-based herbicides in Europe, predominantly for industrial use. In addition, Monsanto’s global business with the nematicide NemaStrike must be divested. The conditions also stipulate the transfer of three Bayer research projects in the area of non-selective herbicides and the granting of a license to Bayer’s digital farming portfolio. BASF is the intended purchaser of these assets.

"Receipt of the European Commission’s approval is a major success and a significant milestone," said Bayer CEO Werner Baumann. " Bayer has now received approvals for the transaction from substantially more than half of the some 30 regulatory authorities, including those in Brazil and China.
The transaction remains subject to customary closing conditions, including receipt of required regulatory approvals. Bayer and Monsanto are working closely with the authorities with the goal of closing the transaction in the second [quarter of 2018. Full article available here](http://www.hortidaily.com/article/41957/EC-approves-Bayer%E2%80%99s-proposed-acquisition-of-Monsanto)

* 1. **African nations sign largest free trade agreement since start WTO**

Last week, African leaders signed what is being called the largest free trade agreement since the creation of the World Trade Organization. The deal creates a continental market of 1.2 billion people, with a combined gross domestic product of more than $3.4 trillion. A major goal is to boost intra-African trade and rely less on the volatility of commodity prices that affect many exports.

The agreement, signed by 44 of the African Union’s 55 member states, should enter into force by the end of this year. Concerns remain. The president of Nigeria, one of Africa’s largest economies, skipped the summit amid trade unions’ objections. “We will not agree to anything that will undermine local manufacturers and entrepreneurs, or that may lead to Nigeria becoming a dumping ground for finished goods,” President Muhammadu Buhari stated.

Africa’s largest economies are expected to benefit most from the deal that progressively eliminates tariffs and other trade barriers, some of them worry that more people from poorer countries will migrate their way. However, [lemonwire.com](https://www.lemonwire.com/2018/03/21/african-nations-sign-largest-free-trade-agreement-since-wto/) reports that some of the continent’s strongest and fastest-growing economies, including Ghana, Kenya and Ethiopia, signed the deal. South Africa’s new president has expressed support but his signing was not announced. [Full article available here](http://www.freshplaza.com/article/191574/African-nations-sign-largest-free-trade-agreement-since-start-WTO)

**Business**

* 1. **Chilean blues smash shipment record**

Chile’s blueberry industry exported a total of more than 110,000 tonnes of fruit in the last year which has set a new export season record. The Chilean Blueberry Committee Executive Director, Andres Armstrong, warned that although results were better, the effects of the weaker and fluctuating dollar would impact returns. He said the main problem with the last season was that the harvest came four weeks too early and the markets were not ready, whereas this season that did not happen. Mr Armstrong added that this season had better fruit quality and flavour due to the hard work of the growers, better orchard management, varietal replacement and new technologies. The European market saw the greatest growth this season of 12 percent mainly due to increased consumption in countries such as France, Italy and Russia. [Full article available here](http://www.fruitnet.com/eurofruit/article/175049/chilean-blues-smash-shipment-record)

* 1. **Maersk Line relaunches Asia-Europe Network to increase schedule reliability**

Maersk Line has announced changes to its services connecting Asia and Europe to focus on improving the reliability of the world’s most comprehensive Asia-Europe network. Enhancements address customers’ needs for stable and efficient services and allow for competitive coverage of ports and main markets in both Asia and Europe.

Port congestion and weather conditions have, among other factors, traditionally impacted reliability on Asia-Europe services. Changes introduced by Maersk Line will address these challenges by significantly improving buffers in schedules, making it easier to accommodate potential disruptions and thus minimising the impact on service delivery. As part of the new network, reliability will be enhanced by reducing the amount of duplicate port calls and allocating more buffer time around hub ports. [Full article available here](http://www.freshplaza.com/article/191317/Maersk-Line-relaunches-Asia-Europe-Network-to-increase-schedule-reliability)

* 1. **2018 Fruit and Vegetable trends**

Dutch IT company, Roamler, has conducted a survey regarding fruit and vegetable trends in 2018. The results: consumers seem to have resolved to eat more fruit and vegetables in the Spring, rather than at New Year. Forty percent of the respondents buy their fruit and vegetables every other day; 47% do so once a week. The article provides figures for different EU countries

* Preference for buying fruit and vegetables at the supermarket
* Naming the most popular fruits and vegetables and the meal they are most commonly consumed at.

The article also notes the growing trend of healthy eating and in parallel the increasing consumption of avocados. [Full article available here](http://www.freshplaza.com/article/191565/Europe-Tomatoes-most-popular-vegetable-bananas-most-loved-fruit)

  **China**

* 1. **Australian fruit and nut exports to China up 500% in last four years**

ANZ[*Future of Fresh*](http://https:/thesbhub.com.au/news-and-insights#.WqnJxehuaUk) reports that fruit and nut exports from Australia to China have increased by 500% in the last four years. It has turned into an industry that is worth 10 billion Australian dollar [7.7 billion USD]. Trends and figures show that the middle class has become a strong supporting community for the Australian fruit and nut industry. The consumers particularly favour almonds, macadamia, tropical fruit and stone fruit, and traditional apples and fresh grapes - and they are willing to pay for quality. [Full article available here](http://www.freshplaza.com/article/191367/China-18-fruit-imports-below-standard-in-February)

* 1. **Walmart China Emphasizes Fresh Goods and Ecommerce for 2018**

# In conjunction with its "annual preparation meeting" earlier this month in the city of Zhuhai, Walmart China released a [media statement](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/GkxTvfF0Jhdh2qFUlwdM_A) outlining its achievements in 2017 and broad strategy for 2018. The document indicates that the company is maintaining its focus on fresh goods and e-commerce. Particularly it seems intent on wading deeper into the fresh goods ecommerce fray in China through a deepened [cooperation with, and dependence on, Chinese ecommerce giant JD.com](http://www.producereport.com/article/walmart-future-selling-groceries-china)—which Walmart partially owns, and also competes with in grocery ecommerce.

Some specific goals mentioned include building "smart supermarkets," more investment in artificial intelligence, and expanding the reach of its in-store pickup centres. Walmart announced in the Chinese-language statement that it would open between 30 and 40 new retail outlets in China in 2018, including "new supermarket formats, compact hypermarts, and Sam's Club stores." It said it would also invest an additional RMB 300 million in upgrading another 50 existing stores and finish a new RMB 700 million distribution centre in the Pear River Delta, its single largest investment in a project in its history operating in China. [Full article available here](http://www.producereport.com/article/walmart-china-emphasizes-fresh-goods-ecommerce-2018)

* 1. **Construction starts on Asia's largest cross-border agricultural products cold-chain logistic centre**

On the morning of March 12, the first-phase construction of the China General Chamber of Commerce's cross-border agricultural products cold-chain logistic centre, formally started in the Ningbo Meishan Bonded Port Area. Upon completion of the project, it will be Asia's largest and most intelligent cold-chain logistic centre for agricultural products imports and exports. It will build 3 advanced environment-friendly, intelligent cross-border cold-chain bonded warehouses, with a total capacity of 60,000 tons, and 3 bonded warehouses for cross-border e-commerce and general trade with a total storage area of over 120,000 square meters. [Full article available here](http://www.freshplaza.com/article/191335/Construction-starts-on-Asias-largest-cross-border-agricultural-products-cold-chain-logistic-center)

 **Food safety**

* 1. **Victims of Australian listeria outbreak could make range of claims**

US lawyer Bill Marler has been involved in food safety cases around the world for 25 years, and commented that Australian authorities had done well to contain the listeria outbreak in this country: "The fact that you've been able to keep this outbreak down to lower numbers is a credit to your health department."

However Marler thinks a class action is likely in Australia, given the number of deaths. Mr Marler said victims could make a range of claims under Australian law. "They would be able to claim for medical expenses, wage losses and future medical needs and expenses." [Abc.net.au](http://www.abc.net.au/news/rural/2018-03-20/listeria-class-action-likely-in-australia/9566854) reports how in the US rockmelon outbreak, a case was made against the growers as well as the large supermarkets. Not only were the growers fined significantly by the criminal court, they also went bankrupt. "Their insurance proceeds went to the victims, and Walmart and Kroger also wound up paying tens of millions to the victims who survived." [Full article available here](http://www.freshplaza.com/article/191444/Victims-Australian-listeria-outbreak-could-make-range-of-claims)

* 1. **Listeria outbreak: Sixth person dies in NSW**

A woman in her nineties from New South Wales has become the sixth person to die from a listeria outbreak linked to contaminated rockmelons. The total number of people affected nationwide remains at 19. There have been no new cases of the disease since the outbreak was identified on February 19. Australia's largest melon export market, the United Arab Emirates, has just re-opened access.

With very little demand for the fruit, rockmelons are now being stored or destroyed. [Full article available here](http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-03-20/listeria-death-in-nsw/9568060)

* 1. **Produce industry keeping tabs on blockchain**

An unfamiliar concept for many at the start of 2017, blockchain now has sufficient interest from the produce industry that the American Produce Marketing Association has formed a task force to follow its development and will be working with retailer pilots of the technology. Walmart brought blockchain to the forefront when it conducted a U.S. trial with sliced mangoes and in August partnered with IBM, Dole and Driscoll’s to further test the digital ledger technology, which companies believe could significantly improve food safety and operational efficiency. An industry taskforce has been set up to contribute to the project with United Fresh Produce Association and the Canadian Produce Marketing Association also having representatives on the task force as observers.

Frank Yiannas, vice president of food safety for Walmart, has been a proponent of blockchain, and faster traceability is a big reason. In its earlier pilot, Walmart traced the source of mangoes in seconds, compared to nearly a full week using conventional methods. Blockchain is showing benefits for Walmart , their customers and suppliers because of this greater transparency

Blockchain should also be useful for sharing food safety information like certifications and audits, which blockchain allows to be processed as data instead of just as a PDF. That (information) can move up the supply chain and then people can actually take that and plug it into their data warehouses and do proper analysis on it and truly assess the risk that they will have of handling and selling of the product.

The biggest hurdle for blockchain will be getting companies throughout the supply chain on board,.

Blockchain is a tool, and a great tool, to enable trackability, traceability, but only if we’re capturing and sharing that data right down the line, and not a lot of people are equipped yet to do that.The cost of implementing such a system is a concern, and some companies may be thinking that the amount required will be more than the normal expense of a recall.

Walmart hopes to make that equation more attractive by wielding its influence on the development of blockchain for widespread use. Data security and privacy are other questions that have yet to be answered. With large retailers exploring the capabilities of blockchain, however, it seems the technology has meaningful momentum.  [Full article available here](https://www.thepacker.com/article/produce-industry-keeping-tabs-blockchain)

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