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President Xi Visits Egypt: China increases imports of frozen strawberries from Egypt



It may come as a surprise to many people that Egypt is a top exporter of frozen strawberries. Now, China is becoming a top buyer. Since May 1st, China scrapped tariffs on imports from Egypt, lowering the cost of market access. See more in this joint report by Yasser Hakim and Chen Tong.

YASSER HAKIM, Ismailia City, Egypt "Those frozen strawberries are not just fruits, it's a success story for Egypt. Let me tell you why."

Egypt is the largest exporter of frozen strawberries in the world with over half a million tons shipped abroad last year. And China is Egypt's fastest growing market.

YASSER HAKIM, Ismailia City, Egypt "I'm Yasser Hakim in the city of Ismailia in Egypt."

CHEN TONG, Linyi, Shandong Province, China "I'm Chen Tong in the city of Linyi in eastern China."

YASSER HAKIM, Ismailia City, Egypt "In this story, we will show you how Egyptian strawberries."

CHEN TONG, Linyi, Shandong Province, China "Arrive in China in the quickest and cheapest way."

The Egyptian city of Ismailia, 200 kilometers east of the capital Cairo, is known for its sunny weather and sandy soil.

MOSTAFA DERBCEO, El Heba for Agricultural Production "We grow the fruit in October or September when the weather conditions are suitable to produce better quality, fiber and taste than in other countries. Sandy soil provides ventilation, which is essential for having good strawberries."

After harvest, strawberries are quickly cooled and meticulously washed to prevent overripening.

MOHAMED ELBATAL, General Manager, El Heba for Agricultural Production "The time span for producing strawberries is crucial. It has to be a quick process to avoid getting spoilt. We sort the strawberries, clean them from the dirt from the land, followed by two phases of cleaning, sorting again before placing it in the IQF."

IQF means Individually Quick Frozen. IQFs are large freezers where berries are stored at ultra low temperatures of -18 to -40°C. Not a good idea to go in there! The frozen berries are then packed in well-sealed cartons and shipped in freezers to maintain structure, taste and shelf life during the trip.

And once these frozen berries arrive at this factory in China, they will be sorted, thawed and cut, and eventually be put into these vacuum freeze dryers. Every month, this factory imports an average of 2,500 tons of frozen strawberries from Egypt. And surprisingly, all these berries will be exported to over 30 countries and regions after processing here.

WU HAO, Marketing Director, Linyi Chengfa Wonderful FD Technologies "The quality of Egyptian strawberries can meet our export standard and they have advantages in price."

And the advantages are becoming bigger now. On May 1st this year, China removed tariffs for goods from Egypt. That means Chinese factories can import Egyptian strawberries at a much lower price if they eventually sell the products in the domestic market.

WU HAO, Marketing Director, Linyi Chengfa Wonderful FD Technologies "If we purchased Egyptian strawberries before May 1st and sold them in the domestic market, we would pay an extra tariff of 30 percent. You can calculate it. It's a great reduction for us now."

Though the factory has not yet sold their products in the Chinese market, the policy is helping them put this business expansion on the agenda, letting more Chinese have a taste.

CHEN TONG, Linyi, Shandong Province, China "Mmm not bad. I think I know why they like the Egyptian ones."

YASSER HAKIM, Ismailia City, Egypt "That's because quality control is a major factor in this process."

Government institutions have put in extra effort to make sure suppliers stick to China's food safety and quality standards.

MOHAMED EL MANASI, Director, Central Administration of Plant Quarantine (CAPQ) "We apply strict measures on all producers. Our inspections start from the cultivation stage, followed by sorting, packaging and then a final inspection at the ports before loading."

That's why exporters here are confident they will sell even more frozen strawberries to China in the coming seasons.

Between May and July this year, China's Linyi city has imported 21,000 tons of frozen strawberries from Egypt. That's an increase of over 75 percent compared with a year ago.

With a projected increase of import volume, the local customs bureau is doing everything they can to make customs clearance more efficient.

WANG YAMING, Deputy Section Chief, Section 3 of Inspection & Quarantine, Linyi Customs "We've opened green lights for them. Factories can reserve in advance. Once goods arrive, we come to check."

Frozen strawberries are just one example. There are more quality fruits from Egypt such as oranges and mangos waiting for their turn. And the zero-tariff policy is allowing more Chinese to taste the sweetness for less, making it a win for both countries. For CGTN, Yasser Hakim in Ismalia City Egypt and Chen Tong, Linyi City, China.

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