

WHOLESALE MARKETS

China backs wholesale sector

At last month's annual World Union of Wholesale Markets congress in Beijing, the Chinese government outlined plans to strengthen the country's wholesale market network

MARIA CAVIT

Secretary General, WUWM

Representatives from wholesale markets in 34 countries of the world recently came together in the first ever congress of the World Union of Wholesale Markets (WUWM) to take place in Asia. Held in early September in Beijing, China, the congress explored the competitiveness of wholesale markets within the global food distribution chain, and the role of public and private markets as fundamental public services serving the commercial, socio-economic and environmental goals of communities. It also aimed to encourage the increased participation of Chinese and Asian markets within the WUWM global network.

Under the theme of "Emerging Strategic Role of Modern Food Markets in the Global Food Supply Chain", the congress included speakers from wholesale markets and institutions in the US, France, Spain, Japan, Germany, Italy, Australia, New Zealand and the UK, as well as from the Chinese Ministry of Commerce, Beijing University Economics



WUWM chairman Donald Darnall

Department, the State Council and various Chinese food markets.

The Chinese Assistant Minister of Commerce, Huang Hai, addressed congress delegates, expressing China's intention to continue to rise to the challenges presented by the rapid changes currently underway within the national food distribution chain. He also said that the country's 4,000-plus



The Chinese government has recognised wholesale markets as vital public services

wholesale markets would work to overcome managerial, infrastructural, communication and logistical challenges.

Improving food safety and quality were two key areas that the Chinese government agreed to support in its recognition of wholesale markets as vital public services and increasingly important players in the food distribution chain. The government's pledge to offer strength and support to Chinese wholesale markets was made evident during the congress with the launch of the Double 100 Programme – a joint initiative between the Ministry of Commerce and the Chinese national association of agricultural wholesale markets (CAWA), also the hosts of this 25th WUWM Congress. The Double 100 Programme will annually offer 100 wholesale markets along with 100 commercial enterprises connected to the market (transport, logistics, retail markets, etc) extensive financial support for the implementation of logistical, monitoring and testing systems. In addition, CAWA will offer information and technical assistance in the areas of security, monitoring, waste treatment, processing and distribution.

Roughly 80 percent of fresh produce sold on Chinese markets is destined for the domestic market. However, warnings were given by various speakers that the incomplete infrastructure currently in place on Chinese wholesale markets, along with limited control measures, gave rise to challenges in the consumer perception of food safety and quality. Suggested solutions include accelerating both government and

sector support for the current wholesale market reform process, and encouraging sales and marketing of produce by the creation of a Chinese wholesale brand that would push forward the development and modernisation process.

CAWA chairman Zengjun Ma noted that there was great potential for China in the international fresh produce trade. He urged support for the creation of standardised production, the development of inspection centres and the implementation of a system of complete traceability. This was supported by WUWM chairman Donald Darnall, who encouraged Chinese markets to explore the increasing demand for ethnic and specialty foods, and by Rungis chairman Marc Spielrein who noted the "new role" for wholesale trade in the international market.

The WUWM Declaration resulting from the congress encouraged the current focus on supply chain management within China and welcomed the strong role of national government in providing legislative framework and monitoring assistance as it supports Chinese market managers and traders to successfully compete and provide citizens "with the highest standards of food safety and security." WUWM welcomed the increased participation of Chinese and Asian markets in its network, encouraging them to take an active role in its activities and offering the possibility to consider a future WUWM Asia regional section that would offer increased information, support and collaboration to markets there in the coming years. ■