

IBA president announces big projects for the IBA in 2020

My second year as president of the International Blackcurrant Association is coming to an end. I wanted to seize the occasion of the traditional Christmas wishes to make a short summary of my presidency until now, before talking about the IBA projects 2020. First of all, I am happy that I have the chance to be surrounded by an excellent team in the IBA Executive. Having a French and a Polish vice-president as well as a Franco-German General Manager is a real strength. All of us have different backgrounds and views of the market. We all have a particular knowledge and experience in sales and markets. I feel that it makes the IBA rich to have such a diversified group of people together in one close team. Yet, the blackcurrant industry has been suffering from several problems over the past ten years, and we all have taken up huge challenges:

Challenges of the past, present and future

Organization of the Polish blackcurrant industry

Nevertheless, changes are underway at least in Poland. The Polish blackcurrant growers have made a big step forward after creating their grower association. Of course, we are happy to have them as members in the IBA since 2012. Moreover, with Piotr Baryla, the head of the KSPCP (the Polish growers' association), as Vice President of the IBA, we are sure to go into the same direction. We are looking forward to more changes in the near future in Poland. But at the same time, other countries like Ukraine have entered the market, and we can already foresee further challenges.

Weed control

Although finding an equilibrium where offer and demand are under control is important to the whole industry, agricultural challenges trouble most of the growers. Mainly the weed control is a big concern: most of the growers are looking forward to efficient sustainable or even organic solutions.

Pollination

Additionally, the worldwide alarming decrease of insects also affects blackcurrant growing. Many are looking for effective ways of increasing their yield, as pollination is not ideal.

Climate change

Environmental problems in general become more and more present in our crop. Over the past years, we have received alarming feedback from almost all blackcurrant growing countries. Whether it is spring frost, hail, drought or heat waves - this kind of disorder afflicts almost every grower, and more and more often (see one of our articles in 2017). While there is overproduction on one hand, there is shortage on the other hand. We need to find new ways of growing, including irrigation systems even in countries where this had not been needed before. Or new varieties with late flowering to avoid frost problems. Still, we cannot prevent all natural hazards and have to face them.

Health properties

Luckily, not everything is bad. Clever researchers have accomplished excellent work. More and more evidence shows that our little black currants are powerful and have impressive potential. Not only their high vitamin-C content makes them valuable to all of us. Blackcurrants are highlighted in scientific publications when it comes to anthocyanins, reduction of oxydative stress, sports recovery, Alzheimer, erectile dysfunction and many more. This is related mainly to some of the polyphenols they contain. Even in research of solutions for cancer, blackcurrants have been mentioned as beneficial. We hope that the celebrity of blackcurrant will grow even more, and will lead people to turn towards this superfruit. We would be happy to listen a presentation about new findings at our next conference in Lviv in 2020!

IBA projects 2020

Coming back to the IBA projects 2020, this will certainly be a year, during which we all hope to see positive changes. We have undertaken steps for the realization of a promising program:

1. Transfer of the IBA from New Zealand to Europe

We have initiated this change in 2018, at our last conference in Angers. Also, we hope that our association will be based in Europe until the next conference in Ukraine. For administrative and financial reasons, this has appeared to be determining for our future. As all countries have agreed on this, we have worked on this project over the past month. Therefore, we are now confident that we will be able to finalize it soon. For several reasons, the “new” IBA will most probably result in an easier way for more countries and individual members to join our association.

2. IBA conference Ukraine

From 2nd to 5th June, we will hold our next international conference in Lviv, Ukraine. The organizing team is preparing an interesting program for all those who want to learn more about emerging countries in the world of blackcurrants. Of course, we will have our traditional visits, and presentations on the most intriguing agronomic and economical questions. I’m looking forward to meeting you there!

3. Multi-national project on weed-control

We cannot announce an official IBA project in this field yet. Still, I want to inform you that we are working on a strategy including several partners from all over Europe for 2021. The problem of weed control after the coming ban of glyphosate is vital to all the growers - and has always been in organic growing. Thus, it seemed important to us to work on solutions on a big level. This project involving all the members of the food chain would be the first of this kind conducted within the IBA - and we sincerely hope that we will manage to start it as soon as possible! I will be happy to meet many of you in Ukraine next June!

Until then, feel free to contact me any time for positive input and sharing your views and ideas.

Together with our vice-presidents Florent Baillard and Piotr Baryla, and with our General Manager Stefanie Sharma, I wish you a peaceful Christmas season, and a happy and successful new year!

Jens Holme Pedersen

IBA President