

To Dubai with ambitious export plans

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Data from the beginning of 2021 show that Latvia exports to 179 countries, according to the Central Statistical Bureau. In the first four months of 2021, the total exports grew by 14% or 590 million EUR compared to the same period in the previous year. A fifth of all exported goods go to countries outside the EU and the CIS. Entering those markets is what Latvia will focus on when participating in the EXPO 2020 Dubai – the event that will be attended by members of the Latvian Exporters Association “The Red Jackets”.

The Latvian Exporters Association ‘The Red Jackets’ works to build an ecosystem and support mechanisms that would allow Latvian exporters to achieve 30% YoY growth in the global market. The association sees EXPO as an opportunity to present its members and get personal feedback, find new partners and buyers, and show the products they have made during the pandemic.

“The Investment and Development Agency of Latvia has been working hard to make Latvia’s participation possible and to increase the country’s visibility in the Middle East and elsewhere. It is an amazing opportunity to show the best from Latvia, our products that can compete with the world’s best creations. This is a chance that needs to be taken to attract investment and to boost export growth, especially for companies with a clear agenda for the Middle East,” says Mārtiņš Tiknuss, Chairman of the Board of the Latvian Exporters Association.

Food processing companies ‘Balticovo’, ‘Rāmkalni’ and ‘Musli Graci’, along with the producer of the anti-reflective glass ‘Gloglass’, and the manufacturer of a new generation concrete ‘Primekss’ are all members of the association set to participate in the EXPO 2020. Entrepreneurs admit that the pandemic has been a setback; therefore, they are on the lookout for ways to fuel their growth. On the bright side, the effect of COVID-19 has been a driving force behind new inventions.

“The impact of the pandemic was cyclic – the first half of the year saw good sales results as we were completing orders received prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, but June and November were critical and we had to use state support. Even with an increase in turnover of 50% compared to 2019, we did not achieve our goals. Disrupted supply chains were a serious drawback for our plans to introduce new products, as was the increase in the prices for logistics services that sometimes were ten times higher than before. This time has taught us to reprioritise and focus on our strengths to achieve success,” says the Product Development Manager at ‘Musli Graci’ Anna Marija Zidere-Laizāne.

Producer of eggs and egg products ‘Balticovo’ felt the effects through limitations imposed on their customers – closed restaurants and cafes, restrictions on hotels, and transportation. “The last few years have been very active for us. The year in the pandemic did not change that – we are continuing the work on free-range chicken housing, building a grain pre-processing facility, and are starting to develop our brand’s premium product range. Our latest product is egg protein ice cream; those with a rather classic taste will appreciate our ice cream made with egg melange,” says Toms Auškāps, the Director of Communication and Development and Board Member at ‘Balticovo’.

The data from the Latvian Exporters Association show that only a few Latvian companies have worked in the UAE. They all have faced the same challenges as it takes a lot of time, even years, and resources to enter the market.

“For the Gulf region, we are attractive, but one must remember that there will be challenges to overcome and things to consider. First of all, building the trust of cooperation partners is not an easy game, and the market is very dense. Second, the region is far from Latvia, which means a lot of time and money will have to be invested. And finally, the culture means we must be tolerant and forget how we negotiate in Europe and the Western world. Still, the companies already exporting to the UAE admit that showing interest, investing, and making an effort to understand the particularities of the region pays off. Therefore, EXPO will help the companies get ahead in achieving their goals,” admits the Head of the LIAA Representative Office in the UAE Inga Ulmane.

“The pandemic has made it hard to attend fairs in person and reach out to new customers. Therefore, we are using this chance to

make new contacts and to offer to taste our products. EXPO means meeting not just regular visitors but also industry specialists who, just like us, will use this opportunity. Our flavours are what represent us, and we will try to continue pursuing our export goals," says the Director of 'Rāmkalni' Sanda Auziņa.

EXPO 2020 is set to start on October 1, 2021. To find out more information about Latvia's participation in EXPO 2020, visit <https://www.expo2020.lv/>

<https://www.liaa.gov.lv/en/article/dubai-ambitious-export-plans>