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By Carl Collen

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The next step in ripening

Softripe, a new fruit ripening system from Germany's Frigotec, is said to offer greater consistency and control



Frigotec, which has been working in the fruit maturing business for over 25 years, has launched a groundbreaking new ripening system, Softripe, which it says offers significant advantages over previous technology and "heralds a new era" for the industry. The company had its world premier for Softripe at this year's Fruit Logistica in Berlin.

Frigotec has been working on fruit ripening for more than 25 years, and has developed the process over time – for example, being the first supplier to offer a reliable measuring and control system for the ripening gas ethylene, which replaced less-reliable ethylene sensors in maturing chambers available to the market. Other developments focused on energy saving, with Frigotec reducing energy consumption by up to 43 per cent in its ripening chambers.

Through contacts in the Brazilian market, Frigotec entered into a cooperation to investigate new ripening technology, and following tests and an application for a worldwide patent, opted to develop this technology for global use. To prove that the system

functioned in Europe, it built a test maturation chamber in Germany, and so Softripe was born.



According to Frigotec, the first major order came from Landgard, which is looking to build a new ripening centre in the Hamburg area, and further projects are in the pipeline.

Managing director Roland Wirth explains that, so far, the industry has

ripened bananas incorrectly, with the maturation process available driving the ripening of the fruit, rather than the banana itself maturing in a gentle and natural way – and this is what Softripe offers.

Frigotec explained that the Softripe process combines Controlled Atmosphere technology with more traditional banana ripening techniques. "The equipment in a Softripe banana chamber is similar to a classic CA storage room. With a very tight seal chamber, changes in the atmospheric values inside such as oxygen, carbon dioxide and ethylene can be measured exactly," Wirth continues. "Due to these changes, the intelligent control system communicates with the bananas and automatically creates the right atmosphere and temperature." After a short ripening period, the fruit matures uniformly and consistently. The bananas can be fully controlled at any time and, if desired, can be stored for days at the touch of a button at their existing colour and degree of ripeness.

"As the banana is not over-ripened, but rather its current biological needs are

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taken into account, an optimal and efficient process can be achieved,” Wirth adds. “An additional advantage is that changes in sales volume can be reacted to flexibly. Bananas can be controlled at any time and, if desired, can be stored for days at the current colour and degree of ripeness.”

Frigotec is confident that this ripening method will soon be adopted and accepted by retailers and consumers across the world – and not just for bananas. The process is seen as being ideally suited to the exotics market for products including avocados and mangoes as it adds

value, and while the process does mean higher investment costs, it also means savings in operational outgoings.