

Europe might find other avocado suppliers because of the scarcity of Peruvian avocado

The avocado is one of the crops that has a great presence on the international market. According to the report "Peruvian avocado, a favorable juncture", issued by the Directorate for economic studies and agricultural information of the Ministry of Agriculture, the increase in this fruit's prices in the international market is due to the sharp decline in production in the Mexican area of Michoacan, and the 30% fall in the production level in all of Mexico.

According to the report, prices have also increased because Peru delayed its shipments of avocado to the United States and Europe (which should begin in April) due to the impact of the coastal El Niño. Fortunately, some crops have already left from the South and from other Peruvian producing areas. "However, representatives of Prohass stated that the bulk of the avocado exports from the plantations in the North and center of the country will be shipped with some delay, as exporters will have to wait for the restoration of the physical infrastructure that was affected by the coastal El Niño," it states.

In addition, Peruvian avocado growers have opted to retain their harvest for a few weeks so that the effects of moisture from the rains disappear, and to see how they were affected by the *Colletotrichum* spp fungus, which will help them to define how to treat the fruit depending on the market the plant to export to.

Moreover, California's Avocado Commission (United States) reported that its production had fallen by a high percentage due to the strong drought that continues to affect them.

Meanwhile, there are voices in the European market saying that the situation will be difficult for consumers, as avocados have become very popular in the past six years, especially the Hass variety. "The demand increases as summer approaches. Prices are already high, as they stand between 80 cents and a euro per piece, especially due to the delay in exports from Peru, which is one of the most important suppliers of the European market," the document states.

The most affected countries are the Netherlands, Belgium, and Italy, among others. These markets might try to bridge the gap generated by Peru with new suppliers, such as Colombia, Israel, Spain, and South Africa, according to the publication. Chile, in turn, has already finished its campaign.

Production prospects

The Directory of Economic Studies and Agricultural Information also stated that it held consultations with the regional directorates of agriculture in the country's main avocado producing areas, especially in La Libertad, Lima, Ica, and Ancash. Those jurisdictions indicated that before the coastal Niño, they expected production would increase by more than 30% over the previous year. However, this situation changed due to the rise in temperature that impacted the avocado plantations' bloom; as well as by the heavy rains that, in many cases, not only affected the plantations but also destroyed infrastructure.

The hopes of sustaining the production are placed in areas that have not suffered the climatological impact, such as Arequipa, Puno, Cuzco, Junin, and Ayacucho.

According to preliminary data, the estimated avocado production in the January-March 2017 period is 60,624 tons, a higher volume than that achieved in the first quarter of the previous years (except for 2016, as compared to this year it fell 7.5%).

The report highlights that Peru can produce avocados throughout the whole year, although the bulk of its seasonal production is concentrated between the months of April and June each year, which is why producers expect the largest volumes for the second or third quarter.

According to data from the Sunat, the coastal el Niño had a small impact on exports between January and March this year. However, the bulk of exports takes place between April and September each year.

Thus, Peruvian exports of the Hass variety, which had steadily grown over the years until reaching a record 65,587 tons in the first quarter of 2016, declined by 32.1% compared to the same period of the previous year (14,300 tons).

"However, exports are expected to recover in the second and third quarters; without surpassing the levels achieved in 2016," the report adds.

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