

Spain: Citrus harvest starts in Huelva

Huelva's citrus sector is already immersed in the 2017/2018 campaign, which kicked off last September with the harvesting of the extra-early mandarins of the Satsuma, Okitsu and Iwasaki varieties, as well as the earliest of the clementines, the Clemenrubi.

The sector faces this new campaign with "positive" prospects, according to the president of the Association of Citrus Growers of the Province of Huelva, Lorenzo Reyes, and this despite the fact that the harvest of these varieties has not started too well, "as there have been problems with the fruits' calibres due to the recent weather conditions, with very high temperatures at night that prevented the fruit from ripening adequately, affecting both sizes and colour." The fact is that citrus fruits need low temperatures at night and heat during the day in order to ripen and acquire the right colour and size.

Moreover, these varieties are not reaching the prices the sector expected, "we had good hopes and expected better prices; it has been a setback and the forecasts we had with these varieties have not been met," laments Reyes.

However, and despite this setback, Reyes assures that "we are optimistic, because the rest of varieties are developing well and have good calibres and we hope that from now on the campaign will develop normally." But above all, the representative of Huelva's citrus growers highlights the "good quality" of the fruit at the start of this campaign.

This optimism also has something to do with the fact that, due to the weather conditions, the citrus harvest in Valencia could be reduced by around 20 or 30%, "and that could be good for us," states Reyes, especially when taking into account that the province of Huelva is the first to start the citrus campaign in Spain, "even though South Africa is shipping oranges that we won't harvest until February and that could harm us."

Although we are still at a very early stage, Reyes believes that the citrus production this campaign in Huelva could be similar to last year's and amount to around 490,000 tonnes, "although everything will depend on the weather. As long as no adverse conditions are recorded, everything should go well."

This Friday, the Council of Agriculture, Fisheries and Rural Development of the Government of Andalusia will present the first citrus harvest prospects for the 2017/2018 campaign in Andalusia. In the whole of the autonomous region, Huelva has the second largest citrus production, behind Seville.

Regarding the number of hectares planted with mandarins and oranges this season, Reyes explains that there has been practically no variation compared to the previous campaign and estimates the acreage at around 17,000 hectares, with this figure split almost 50/50 between mandarins and oranges, in line with what has been observed in previous campaigns, in which mandarins have been gaining ground on oranges.

The mandarin harvest continues with the varieties Oronules and Orogras, as well as with the Clemenules in the case of the Clementines. As of December, the harvest will also start for hybrid varieties like the Nova, and later with protected varieties like the Nadorcott, Orri and Murcott. For oranges, the harvest is kicking off this month, in October, with the early Navel, Navelina and Navelate varieties, which will be followed by the Salustiana, Navel powel and Navel chislet. The season will then finish with the late varieties, the Valencia late and Valencia delta.

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