

USDA: Australian orange export estimate buoyed by China's recognition of pest-free zone

A United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) report has forecast a 27% increase in Australian orange exports next season, thanks to a decision by China to recognize South Australia's Riverland region as fruit fly-free.

In a recent Global Agricultural Information Network (GAIN) report, the USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) forecast Australia's orange production would remain steady around the 480,000 metric tons (MT) mark, new regulations would help raise up overseas shipments by more than a quarter to 230,000MT.

"China is now Australia's largest export market, overtaking Japan. In November 2017, China agreed to amend its import conditions for Australian citrus, which could expand future exports," the department said.

"The new import conditions recognize South Australia's Riverland region as free from fruit flies and it requires Australian exporters to utilize colder disinfestation temperatures.

"Shipments of Australian citrus to China by container take three weeks by sea, reportedly one of the shortest transit times for Southern Hemisphere citrus producers."

The report also highlighted planting acreage for Navel oranges had risen while it had fallen for Valencias, and the expansion of new orchards was "relatively slow" given nurseries had to wait up to two to three years to supply trees and "biosecurity regulations prevent the importation of tree stock".

"Total production of oranges depends on growing conditions, water availability, and heat fluctuations over the growing season," the report said.

"Australia's orange industry is free from the citrus greening disease (Huanglongbing or HLB), which has affected some citrus regions in other countries.

"In recent years, investment in modern packing line technology has improved production efficiency for large fruit processors. Packing houses, which focus on exports, now use traceability, quality assurance systems, refrigerated storage and transportation to ensure better quality.

"Utilization of fruit grading technology is also on the rise, which helps improve fruit appearance and accurately identifies color and blemishes."

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