

Argentina: Lemon exports set for 'significant rise' in 2018, says Federcitrus

Argentina's lemon industry is expected to continue its recovery from the severe frosts it suffered a few years ago, with exports for the upcoming season forecast to increase by around 9-10%.

Argentine Citrus Federation (Federcitrus) president José Carbonell told Fresh Fruit Portal national production was also expected to increase – from 1.4 million metric tons (MT) last year to approximately 1.55 million MT.

“We had some very severe frosts in 2013, and production in the years since then has been much lower than our productive capacity, so this increase is part of that recovery, and we are convinced that we can surpass our previous production levels,” he said.

“This year we haven't had many favorable conditions – it was a dry spring and start to the summer, which was the case over a large area, including northern Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil.”

However, he said fruit quality should be excellent for the season, which typically sees harvesting from March until August.

Carbonell said lemon exports would likely be stimulated by what are expected to be attractive market conditions in Europe resulting from lower supply from Spain and Turkey.

The Spanish lemon industry recently put out an updated forecast estimating year-on-year volumes would drop 8% year-on-year to 1 million MT, while Turkey is also reported to have been experiencing a shortage of supply.

“[This situation] would invariably improve the possibilities and the demand for fruit from the Southern Hemisphere,” Carbonell said.

In addition, he said exports would be spurred on by the availability of five new markets.

“Last year we opened five new markets. The most important are in the Americas – Mexico, the U.S. and Brazil – and this will stimulate the possibilities to increase fresh fruit exports,” he said, adding the other two markets were Vietnam and Indonesia.

Northwest Argentina officially regained access to the U.S. market in May last year after authorities declined to extend a stay on imports. However, while the industry had planned to send the inaugural shipments in 2017, this was not possible due to weather-related issues.

“We have not yet carried out shipments to the U.S, and we are going to start with a huge amount of prudence this year,” Carbonell said.

He declined to make an export estimate for the market, but emphasized that industry would be especially careful with the U.S. so as not to end up in a situation in which there are tensions with U.S. growers and distributors.

“Volumes won’t be very significant in the beginning but they will build up in the medium-term. We have to develop the market, which has a very consolidated consumption and could therefore be important for Argentina in the future.”

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