

Fall in Spain's lemon production opens opportunities for Argentina

The fall in Spain's lemon production, which is estimated at 1.1 million tons, i.e. about 150,000 tons less than in the previous season, opens an opportunity for Argentina to increase its exports to the European market. Last year, the country sent 130,000 tons of fresh lemons to that destination (the bulk is processed).

Jose Carbonell, the president of the Argentine Federation of Citrus (Federcitrus), said that - even though it was still too early to make a forecast - they expected to export 200,000 tons of fresh lemons to the European Union this year. Argentina and South Africa will cover the demand of that region now that Spain's production has decreased.

"There is a reasonable expectation that the production volume will improve this campaign; production has been recovering after the frost of 2013 and the fruit's quality is excellent," he said.

The expectation is to increase production by 10%, from 1.4 million tons last year to 1.55 million in 2018. The strong part of the harvest is expected to start after Easter.

"It seems this season will be a little better for sweet lemons than in recent years and similar to last year's season for the lemon for the industry," he said.

Regarding the resumption of exports to the United States, he said they would be very prudent because Argentine producers had "tenacious adversaries in California. The evolution of this exports will depend on their reception there, the first impression we make, and the East coast's demand, as that's where we will begin."

According to data from the US Census Bureau Trade Data, last year the US imported 103,895 tons of fresh lemons. Mexico, which exports 90% of its production to that market, was responsible for placing 53,644 tons of that volume, and Chile, which increased by more than 30 percent, placed 41,246 tons. According to a study, the country could send to the US 90,000 to 120,000 tons of lemons per year. Strong purchases are concentrated between June and October.

Argentine producers have decided to send fruit from previously closed deals. "Nothing in consignment," Carbonell said.

Argentina is analyzing non-traditional markets in the East, such as Hong Kong, and Eastern Europe that could also absorb part of its production, as it has the most important industrial cluster in the world (75% of the harvest is industrialized).