

Italian citrus season estimated to end with lower volumes

The Italian citrus season is nearing its end. According to estimates, five to ten per cent less will be harvested than in the 2015/17 season. The cause can be found in the heat of last summer. The rain in September in the largest production areas of Italy partially compensated for the effects of the drought, according to a recent report by the USDA.

Oranges

After Spain, Italy is the largest producer of citrus in Europe. Sicily and Calabria combined are good for the lion's share of production. In these regions, 59 and 22 per cent of the Italian oranges are harvested. The most important varieties are Tarocco, Moro, Sanguinello, Naveline and Valencia, although interest in varieties Ippolito and Meli has been increasing recently.

Regarding quality, this season is expected to go down in history as exceptional. Despite a harvest ten per cent smaller due to summer drought, the rain in September limited much of the damage. The sizes are medium. Thanks to the rain in September, the orange production is recovering well compared to the 2015/16 volume, and quality is excellent according to reports. Because of this, Italy could extend the season a bit.

Because import of oranges from Spain was halved, Italy's total import was 33 percent lower at 145,733 tonnes in 2016. Spain has been the largest supplier of oranges for years, but its market share is under pressure. In 2014, Spain was still good for 60 per cent of import, but that had decreased to 48 per cent by 2016. Italy appears to mostly be importing more from Germany, the Netherlands and Egypt.

The export side of things is estimated to grow by 18 per cent. Because of this, volume amounts to 143,796 tonnes of oranges. This is mostly thanks to a larger export to Germany, which is 27 per cent larger. Export to neighbouring countries Switzerland, Austria and France is also increasing.

Tangerines

Seedless clementines are good for about 80 per cent of the tangerine production. The remaining 20 per cent is taken up by tangerines. The most important production areas can be found in Calabria, Sicily and Apulia, where 50, 23 and 14 per cent of the Italian tangerine production is harvested, respectively. Within clementines, the most important varieties are Comune (or Oroval) and Monreal. Avana and Tardivo di Ciaculli are the most important tangerine varieties.

The estimates take into account a volume five per cent smaller compared to the previous season. The summery heat was damaging to the tangerines as well, and as with oranges, part of the losses are compensated for by the rain of September.

Lemons

A regular season is expected for lemons, comparable to the previous season. The most important varieties, together good for 86 per cent of production, are Femminello Siracusano, Lunario, Interdonato, Limone di Sorrento and Limone di Procida.

In 2016, export increased by about 16 per cent compared to the year before. This was mostly thanks to more sales to Germany and Austria. These two countries are also the largest buyers of Italian lemons.

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