

Chilean clementine season sees greater volumes of early varieties

The Chilean clementine season is running slightly ahead of last year despite expectations for a year-on-year drop overall.

Juan Enrique Ortúzar of the Chilean Citrus Committee told FreshFruitPortal the country had so far shipped around 10,000 metric tons (MT).

Growers have harvested around 17% of the crop, compared to 15% by this time last year.

But Ortúzar said that the increase “does not reflect the forecast decline of 8-10% estimated by the Committee”.

According to Julio Cornejo, a citrus advisor, the increase to-date is due to greater supplies of early varieties.

In addition, he said that the fruit sizing is coming along “quite well”. Growers have made an effort recently to achieve the best sizing possible, he explained.

“There is a real consciousness that it is important to have good sizes, and that is being reflected in the fruit that is a little larger this year,” he said.

A good number of degree days contributed to the good sizing this year, he said. This has also helped the fruit achieve good sugar levels.

Chilean clementine season off to good start

The industry has also enjoyed favorable growing conditions, according to Ortúzar. “This season it’s hardly rained at all, so we’re able to harvest really easily,” he said.

The industry is expecting to harvest around 58,000MT, slightly under last year’s number.



However, Ortúzar said that he sees “quite strong growth” in the industry.

“There’s varietal reconversion in some areas. For example, in the northern area, there’s a crisis with the Flame variety of table grape, which has led to an increase in citrus plantings,” he said. “There are some growers who instead of planting grapes are planting clementines and mandarins.”

The varietal reconversion is largely taking place on older orchards that were planted in the 90s, he said.

Market response

As for the market response for Chilean clementines so far this season, Ortúzar said that everything has been going well.

“I think that the season has started off strong. The markets are waiting and they have high expectations for Chilean clementines,” he said.

However, he noted that Chile still focuses too heavily on the U.S. market and is seeking growth elsewhere.

“I think that getting into China is important. It’s going to give a new boost to citrus and it’s possible that we develop new lines of products a bit different from what we have planted for the U.S. market,” he said.

“We’re going to have to be aware of the preferences of the Chinese market that really values sweet fruit with low acidity.”

One of the key issues in the Chilean soft citrus industry at the moment is finding a variety that fills the window after clementines finish and before mandarins start.

“Although clementines and W. Murcott mandarins can supply the market during the citrus season, we’re missing a variety that can cover the gap between them,” he said.

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