

Spanish citrus crop down, but season off to good start

The Spanish citrus season has started off strong with supplies of satsumas and clementines, but the total crop is forecast down significantly on last year.

President of the country's Citrus Management Committee, Manuel Arrufat, told FreshFruitPortal.com that the season began with an early bloom of the fruit categories, which boosted the opening stages of the season.

In addition, the latest Brexit delay has also quelled concerns in the Spanish citrus industry for now. The U.K. - a major market for the sector - had been due to leave the EU on Oct. 31 with or without a deal in place, but this has since been postponed to Jan. 31.

"The Oct. 31 exit did not materialize, and so we were able to avoid logistical and bureaucratic problems," said Arrufat.

Another benefit for Spain has been decreased competition from imports this year.

"We haven't seen a lot of pressure from competition from the Southern Hemisphere. This is especially true of South Africa, which this year did not see growth in the European market," explained Arrufat.

Forecasts for the 2019-20 season

Overall, 6.1m metric tons (MT) of Spanish citrus are expected to be harvested.

"This is 19% less than last year but it's only 10% down from the average of the last five seasons," he added.

Arrufat also said that the decrease is because of "the extraordinary production citrus seen in the last season. It was the highest on record. This is an important decrease but its also not something too troubling".

"The decrease is coming mostly from soft citrus (-25%) and oranges (-17%)," he said.



He added that there will be sufficient supplies for Spain's citrus markets.

Additionally, he said that "the decrease is much more significant in clementines, in the Nules variety especially - not so much in the late mandarins, of which new plantations are still coming into production".

Market reception

So far, Spain citrus has been well received in export markets, Arrufat said.

"I think that this year, considering the circumstances, there is a great opportunity to highlight the quality of our clementines," he said.

Prices thus far have also generally reflected the lower supply levels, he explained.

He also commented that the weather this season has been particularly good. The temperatures and humidity have been "ideal" for clementines, he detailed.

Currently, Spanish citrus is performing "very well" in markets. Although more than 90% goes to the EU, Arrufat said that the industry has been diversifying its exports.

"Europe is less and less our main preference," he said. The country has its sights on India and is consolidating in China and Canada.

Regarding the U.S., Arrufat commented on new tariffs that were implemented earlier this year. He said the U.S. should "reevaluate the situation".

"These new tariffs could help Morocco to lead in the U.S. market," he said.

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