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## **Snake River Produce ushers in new season with good quality, high hopes**

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Early indications showed Snake River Produce's 2014 Spanish Sweet crop to be of a smaller size profile, but in early September Tiffany Cruickshank, transportation manager and sales/marketing assistant of the Nyssa, OR, operation, told *The Produce News* that the onions were of excellent quality.

"Compared to last year at this point, we are seeing smaller size but much better quality," Cruickshank said.

Snake River General Manager Kay Riley added that numbers will likely be akin to those of 2013, noting, "We would expect similar volume at Snake River and in the Treasure Valley as a whole."

In 2013 farmers contended with record heat and late rains. This year growers in certain areas of the valley faced serious water shortfalls during the season.

Still, with resolve and experience gained through generations of farming, farmers moved fields to best suit the No. 1 crop. The onion veterans who are partners in Snake River Produce bring that expertise and more to the company's stature.

Now in its 15th year as Snake River Produce, the company was owned and operated for some 50 years prior by Salt Lake City-based Muir-Roberts Co. In 1999 Treasure Valley onion growers Reid Saito, Ken Teramura, Les Ito and Ross Nishihara, along with Kay Riley, who had served as vice president of operations for Muir-Roberts, bought the assets and business from the Utah company.

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The late Pat Takasugi, also a grower and an Idaho State Representative, came on board as part owner and grower in 2003. When he died in 2011, his wife, Suzanne, assumed his interest, and in 2013 the company expanded with its newest partners, Brian and Randy Kameshige.

“The one thing about our group is that they are very active in industry affairs,” Cruickshank said. “For example, Reid Saito has served as president of the Malheur County Onion Growers. Ken Teramura and Les Ito, as well as Reid, are longtime members of the Malheur County Onion Growers Board. Ross Nishihara serves on the IEEOC Marketing Order; Randy Kameshige is a member of the Owyhee Irrigation District Board; and Pat Takasugi served as the Idaho Director of Agriculture. We all know that Kay has served on a plethora of committees, but to name a few he is former president of the National Onion Association, current chairman of the IEEOC Marketing Order and president of Certified Onions Inc.

“Not only are they great at their regular farming and marketing jobs, but our owners are also always working hard to ensure there is a future in agriculture.”

Cruickshank went on to say in early September that as the season deepens, transportation challenges continue to come up and Snake River Produce is watching the situation closely.

“We anticipate freight being a struggle this season,” she said. “The national economy seems to be improving, which is a great thing, but it does put added stress on rail and truck availability. This early in the season, we are hoping more trucks will move into the area as they hear loads are available. I also believe rail demand will be up and railcar volume will be limited.

“The Cold Train cessation does not help because loads previously shipped out on the Cold Train will still need to be transported and that will just add to the demand,” Cruickshank said.

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