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Farmworker strike in Baja California causes minor disruptions

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A strike by farmworkers the week of March 16-20 in southern Baja California did cause some disruption of shipments of produce, but a couple of sources said it did not cause major problems.

David Castanedo, who is on the sales desk for Baja Best Distributing Inc. in San Diego, said the strike did not affect his firm's farms in that region, nor the farms of most of the other major shippers of tomatoes, cucumbers, squash and other vegetables.

A report in the *Los Angeles Times* and in some Spanish language videos on YouTube indicated to Castanedo that the issue concerned mostly strawberry and raspberry production. He said the YouTube video from workers demanded labor wages of \$3 per tray for raspberry pickers.

"The market is only \$5, so if you add in the containers and the clamshells, that is too high," he said.

In any event, Castanedo said the striking workers were impeding transportation but not preventing harvesting at most Baja California farms. He said Baja Best had diverted its U.S.-bound trucks to a less-traveled route to make the trip into United States without disruption.

Speaking on Monday, March 23, Castanedo was not aware of further disruptions this week.

Mike Aiton, marketing manager of Prime Time International in Coachella, CA, also had heard of the labor unrest in Baja the previous week but did not know the extent of the problem. He said Prime Time's Baja production would pick up next week (March 30-April 3), and the firm had very limited production last week. He had heard of a few trucks being delayed.

While the newspaper report in the *Los Angeles Times* spoke of supply gaps in organic strawberries, for the most part strawberry production has moved north to Southern and Coastal California, including farms in Orange County, Oxnard, Santa Maria and even in Watsonville. Currently Mexico provides relatively few strawberries to the U.S. market.

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