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Promotable Sonoran grape volumes to be available through July 4

June 20, 2017

As of June 14, Mexico's grape importers had crossed 17.7 million boxes of grapes into Nogales, according to U.S. Department of Agriculture figures. The Flame seedless variety accounted for 9.2 million boxes of this total. Sugraone was the second-largest export variety, with a total of 3.3 million boxes.

On June 17, Miky Suarez, the sales manager of and a partner in MAS Melons & Grapes LLC, said the industry will "probably ship 20.5 million boxes" this year.

Jerry Havel, the director of sales and marketing for Fresh Farms LLC, said Fresh Farms will likely "have three more full weeks" of shipping Sonoran grapes before the fresh deal moves to central California. This would see the last of Sonora's grapes shipped about July 6.

With a large Flame crop and a very large Sonoran grape volume overall, Suarez said, "for the most part it's been an active season." Sonoran grapes "have moved pretty good and, for the industry on the distribution side, we were ready for it."

At that time, Havel said Sonora's harvest was 90 percent complete. Suarez guessed 85 percent. Suarez said the movement for red grapes has been better than it was for green. Flame Seedless volume this year, which will end over 10 million cases, will be up 1 million over 2016. "We were prepared and knew what was coming," he said. MAS will be promoting Mexican grapes into the Independence Day holiday.

Looking toward the last weeks of the Sonoran deal, Havel stressed, “There are still promotable volumes. There is still ample storage for July Fourth ads. All three colors [green, red and black] have good, promotable volumes. The deal has gone pretty well. In May, we had high FOBs. After Memorial Day there was an increase in supplies and in the first two weeks of June we had the volumes to carry ads. A lot of excitement in stores helped move the volume. The price was OK but not as good as it was in May.”

The week of June 10 was a little quieter in preparation for Independence Day promotions. “But the next two weeks will be pretty busy,” he said.

John Pandol, the director of Pandol Bros. Inc., said the Sonoran deal started “with a very empty market and it was a slightly late start. No one was 100 percent fulfilling orders for the first third of the deal.” That situation turned rapidly after Memorial Day. Despite having volume well over 2016, the fruit “was getting sold and working through the system. I heard of no big problems operationally or market-wise.” In making marketing plans, “usually everyone looks at what happened last year. When you have 20 percent more volume, it’s hard to get movement in a short period of time.” He credits Nogales distributors for “getting the job done” in an efficient manner.

“Last year, Sonora exported 16.1 million [cases],” Pandol said. This season, “we passed that number on Monday, June 12.”

He added that June 14 USDA data showed “we were at 17.7 million, which is 3.5 million ahead the total at the same date last year. People who bet the ‘over’ won.”

Pandol’s own estimate is that, as of June 14, the industry had yet to receive 15 percent of its seasonal volume and 30 percent left to ship. This means that there are Sonoran storage grapes in Nogales. Pandol said there are about four days of shipping volume in storage. This is a normal storage volume for this time of year, and considering that the 2017 crop is a larger volume than last year, this speaks well to marketing management by Mexican grape distributors.

Pandol estimates that Sonoran volume will end “with the shipping weeks of June 19, June 26 and a transition of July 3 from both desert and central California.”

In a June 17 telephone interview, Pandol said his firm was still receiving a small grape volume from Guaymas, which is Sonora’s southernmost grape-producing area. Only one of Pandol’s 14 Sonoran grape growers had finished shipping by June 17.

Pandol noted that Caborca, in northern Sonora, produces 6 million to 7 million boxes of grapes. This is much larger than Coachella’s 4 million to 5 million production.

Jalisco to expand

This year Fresh Farms offered a new dimension to the Mexican grape industry through launching a new vineyard in Jalisco. Havel said this year’s Jalisco volume was only 40,000 total boxes. “We look for 250,000 from Jalisco next year and we will probably start earlier (in April) than we did this year.”