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# Slow start, strong middle expected for California fig season

May 7, 2018

The California fig season is expected to kick off in mid-May with light volume. Supplies will ramp up in June and July, and by August shipments should be at their peak.

“August is always a great month to promote fresh figs,” said Kurt Cappelluti, sales manager for Madera, CA-based Stellar Distributing Inc., which is owned by Catania Worldwide of Toronto. “We should have 1,000 employees at our peak,” he added.

Cappelluti said the Breva crop, which is produced on last year’s fruitwood, is light this year, but it should be followed by a strong main crop. Stellar expects its Breva crop to start in the San Joaquin Valley around May 20 with the main crop kicking in by July 15.

George Kragie, president of Western Fresh Marketing, which is also headquartered in Madera, the center of fig production, noted that its production will start in the desert in mid-May. Western Fresh will add production from the most southern region of the San Joaquin Valley by the end of May. Kragie agreed that the Breva crop will be light on volume but when the desert’s main crop adds to the volume in June, Kragie said there would be a build-up in supplies. He added that high f.o.b. prices would greet the deal on the front end. “The early fruit is usually very large so there could be huge pricing with foodservice taking most of the production,” said Kragie.

He agreed that August would bring the peak of the deal. “We have all the varieties in August and our production is at its peak,” said Kragie. Speaking in late April, Kragie was excited for the season to start. He said figs have become a trendy item for both foodservice and retail. “Frankly, it is because of their versatility. You can use figs in savory or sweet recipes. You can poach them or bake them with gorgonzola cheese. They are great in salads and you see them in a lot of tart recipes as well.”

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Kragie said when many people think of figs “they only think of the old fig newtons, but there is a big difference between the taste of a fig in a fig newton and a fresh fig taste.” It is this difference that he said has fueled the resurgence of the fig led by the nation’s top chefs.

Both Kragie and Cappelluti said that while volume will peak in August, there would be solid supplies available through the fall months. Stellar will begin transitioning to its Mexico production in late November and early December, while Kragie expects to have California figs as late as Christmas.

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