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Coachella Valley expecting excellent year because of superior winter weather

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California grape industry veteran John Harley, who has seen a thing or two over his 35 years in the industry, said “the stars are perfectly aligned for the Coachella Valley deal this year.”



Speaking specifically of grapes, the Anthony Vineyards sales manager said, “It looks like we are going to have a very good crop this year — especially on greens. For whatever reason, it seems like there is a better set on the greens. The volume is definitely going to be greater than last year. We (as an industry) should be close to 5 million boxes, which is a more typical year.”

Harley’s comments were echoed by grape industry members from all corners of the valley and were also repeated by producers of other crops. As is almost always the case in agricultural production, it is the weather that is taking the bows for this year’s expected stellar production.

“Coachella Valley has had ideal growing conditions,” said Chance Kirk, chief executive officer of Silver Canyon Sales, which is one of the sales agents for Tudor Ranch’s production, which includes grapes, dates and lemons. “We’ve seen the coldest January and February in a long time. There were plenty of chill hours. We are super jazzed about this year’s grape crop with regard to both yields and quality.”

Tony Bianco of Desert Fresh Inc. in Coachella agreed the crop “looks beautiful,” adding that he is seeing a good number of bunches on each vine, which indicates good volume. In mid-April, he was anticipating a good start to the deal because it appeared that because of its late start there could be a little bit of a gap between the Chilean deal and the start of the California.

Mexico’s spring grape deal is also expected to start a little bit later than last year as it has the same cold weather in the winter that hit California. *The Produce News* reported that Mexico is expecting promotable volume of Flame Seedless from late May to late June with green seedless promotions most beneficial through much of June.

Harley agreed that June would be the best time to promote the grapes from California’s Coachella

Valley. He expects that there will be no green grapes from Chile on the market when California gets under way, though he believes there will still be some red grapes, most notably Crimson Reds. In any event, he expects the May market to be strong, stating that the grape f.o.b. price for the start of the California deal could be in the \$40 per carton range. "There should be promotable volume throughout June but not in May," he predicted. "We could use lots of promotions in June; there is going to be sizable volume the first two weeks of June."

Weather, which comes in the form of high temperatures, will dictate just how long the season lasts. Bianco expects to still be harvesting in early July. With the later start, grower-shippers will be hoping to get an extra week in July so the crop still can be marketed in about an eight-week time frame.

Mike Way of Prime Time International in Coachella revealed that the colder winter has also been beneficial for the crops his company produces, which does not include grapes. By mid-May, Prime Time will be selling an array of commodities, including green, red and yellow peppers, green beans, sweet corn and watermelons. Way said 2019 has produced excellent growing conditions for each of those crops so he is looking for strong volume with each commodity. He said the timing is five to seven days later than last year for each crop. "May is going to be a big month for Prime Time," he quipped.

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