
- Advertisement -

Desert watermelon volumes to be promotable for July 4

May 27, 2019

Remarkably cool weather in Phoenix-area fields and other desert watermelon producing districts is delaying harvest and shipping.

“The weather has been wacky for the desert crop,” said James Neal Jr., the watermelon salesman for Epic Produce Sales LLC, based in Phoenix. The weather is making it hard to predict harvest dates, other than to know they are very late.

He did say with confidence, “Phoenix will have very good promotable volumes for the July 4



holiday.”

In the Phoenix office of

Epic Produce Sales LLC, are salesmen James Neal, Jr., Pato Rodriguez and company owner Art Miller.

On May 9, Neal indicated “today’s normal is 90 degrees. Yesterday, it was 67 and rainy.” He added that the period between late October 2018 and early March 2019 the area had no temperatures exceed 90 degrees. That was a first for Phoenix in 60 years.

He noted that watermelon production in Hermosillo, Sonora, was also delayed by cool March weather. This backed up Hermosillo shipping into mid-May, which has proved not to be a problem given that desert shipping in the U.S. is also delayed.

Neal said that Phoenix usually starts shipping watermelons in the May 25 to June 1 timeframe. Depending upon when Phoenix weather warms, the harvest this year should begin in the range of June 12-15. He said Phoenix volume may be up slightly this year.

Yuma watermelon shipping usually begins in the May 15-25 range. That, of course, is also delayed. Neal said it’s difficult to guess what open-market watermelon volume will come from the Yuma area because growers there place a great deal of their fruit in contract sales.

Looking toward the market this spring, Neal is “cautiously optimistic, given the fact that Hermosillo was late. Overall, the volume is late. To this point, I’ve seen no major promotions of watermelons by U.S. retailers. But, I believe we will have quality fruit and promotable numbers from today (with that fruit coming from Hermosillo), going forward. There is absolutely no reason that Western shippers should not be placing aggressive pricing.” When Hermosillo winds down, the southern Bakersfield growing district, as well as Yuma and Phoenix will have good supplies.

Neal said the desert watermelon fields looked beautiful in mid-May. He is concerned though, that the conditions have been good for setting up plant diseases, such as fusarium wilt and powdery mildew, which would manifest themselves when the weather warms. While this is possible, that outcome is unknown until the weather changes.

He noted that at any time going forward, Phoenix temperatures can leap from 90 to 115 degrees, which would dramatically stimulate watermelon growth.

Neal said that Epic and other watermelon shippers continue cooperating with programs organized by C.H. Robinson and Pacific International to donate watermelons to Phoenix area schools.

Last June, Epic donated pallets of watermelons to an after school program in Tempe. He said students decorated their watermelons with paper ears and eyes before taking them home for eventual consumption.

Epic has also contributed to the local Hamilton High School “one in four” program match contributions to help school lunch and breakfast programs.

[Print](#)