
- Advertisement -

'One of the worst seasons' for California navels

August 8, 2019

The 2018-19 California navel orange season will go down in history as one of the worst seasons outside of a major freeze year, according to California Citrus Mutual. As the season kicked off, the market faced a series of challenges. Unprecedented volumes of imported fruit were present in the marketplace for much later into the season than is typical, which remains a significant disruption to the market. Consequently, the normal pent-up demand for fresh California citrus early in the season did not exist. Instead, there was an oversupply situation and a confused customer base.

California's mature fruit entered a marketplace where there was inconsistent quality, cheap prices and poor flavor. There was a lack of movement at the store level and therefore reluctance by the retail buyer to purchase additional volumes of citrus. The customer base had a bad taste from poor quality imported fruit, which made initial marketing efforts extremely difficult. This was compounded by an inferior product in the mandarin category. Differentiating California product from offshore supplies proved to be more difficult than anticipated.

To make matters worse, the California crop was dominated by small sizes. With consumer preference being for large size fruit, especially during the holiday season, the industry was fighting for shelf-space with a less-than-desirable size structure.

The domestic market was also impacted by the ongoing trade dispute with China. Generally, there is a push to harvest fruit in November in anticipation of strong demand around the Chinese New Year. That demand normally extends from January through April, but that did not occur this year. Some fruit was exported but was immediately delayed due to increased port inspections in China. For 2018-19 crop year, tariff levels and inspection practices on California citrus created barriers that were difficult to overcome. This forced marketers to place more time and attention to the domestic

market.

Additionally, the United States pulled out of the proposed Trans-Pacific Partnership Trade Agreement, which would have lowered tariffs on U.S. and California fruit entering Japan. This allowed competing nations to enter the Japanese market at a price lower than California's. Expanding Japanese export opportunities to compensate for losses in China was therefore not a good option. In fact, just sustaining that export base became a significant challenge. All this was readily visible by late October and it became evident that the first quarter would be difficult.

The California Agricultural Statistics Service 2018-19 Navel Orange Objective Measurement Report released Sept. 12, 2018 forecast the navel orange crop at 80 million cartons. The Central Valley would harvest 77 million of those cartons. Fruit volume was estimated at 426 per tree, well above the five-year average of 333. The average Sept. 1 diameter was 2.117 inches, also well below the five-year average of 2.269 inches.

[Print](#)