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King Fresh expecting increase in cherry volume

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With fresh produce in high demand, California cherry growers are preparing for a lighter crop than is typical. So far, quality appears to be excellent with a very low percentage of spurs and doubles as early indications point toward a volume around 7 million boxes.

“We see no problems so far,” said Keith Wilson, president of King Fresh Produce, based in Dinuba, CA. The company ships early season cherries, among other high-demand commodities like pomegranates, blueberries and strawberries. “We will increase our cherry volume this year by 10 percent,” he continued, “as well as increase our organic cherry offerings.”

King Fresh has been strategically upgrading the packline and its packing process at its Dinuba facility in preparation for the upcoming season, “We’re employing more technology for faster, smoother and more efficient packing,” said Wilson. “And we’ve just completed a \$1.2 million expansion, adding 15,000 square feet of regular storage that will expand our palletizing area, giving us more capacity.”

One of three early season cherry shippers between Bakersfield and Fresno, the company boasts mainly red cherry varieties, but does ship a small amount of Rainiers as well. “The early season cherry deal is interesting because there’s no supply prior to the California season,” said Wilson. “The pipeline is dry, and since California cherries are one of the earliest crops to harvest, we don’t compete head on with the tree fruit or grapes for labor.”

As far as value for the retailer, Wilson reported big success with one- and two-pound cherry clamshells but noted that King Fresh is always willing to try new packaging types to meet the needs of the individual retailer. Wilson’s opinion of the very best value though? Location.

“My take with cherries is that a lot of these early varieties are grown in the 50-mile are around where our packinghouse is located,” he said. “A lot of that fruit is being trucked out of the region to be packed, and that means a lot of miles on those cherries. Packing early-season cherries right here in Dinuba results in a significant savings in freight, and in general, packouts seem to be better with less miles on the fruit.”

With so many other tree fruits shipping in the region, Wilson said it makes more sense to pick up multiple fruits in one place, loading cherries with other stone fruits.

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