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Del Rey Avocado anticipates extension of Peruvian season

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With the shipments of Peruvian avocados to the United States running about three weeks later than last year, Del Rey Avocado Corp. expects the season to extend further into September than is usually the case.

Speaking to *The Produce News* on May 13, Del Rey President Bob Lucy said he is not expecting to have a solid volume of Peruvian avocados until close to the middle of June. "Usually we have good volume by about May 20th and are cleared out by Labor Day," he said. "This year, I suspect we are

going to push longer into September, which isn't a bad thing."

In fact, he noted that California's avocado crop is also expected to be marketed longer than usual with good supplies through September and even into October. For California, one of the main causes of the extended season is the coronavirus. Of course, the much larger crop — approaching 400 million pounds — is also a major factor.

"We have shortened our workday in the packingshed from 10 hours to eight hours and have cut down on our Saturday schedule to give the workers a break," Lucy said. That has resulted in decreased production on a weekly basis and a natural extension of the season.

For Peru, he said the delay is the result of the immaturity of the fruit. Avocados are tested for dry matter and are not harvested until reaching a specific level, which correlates to maturity. Cooler weather has slowed that process this year.

Lucy said Del Rey has been growing its Peruvian supplies and expects about a 10 percent increase this year. "We were offered more but because of the uncertainty surrounding the coronavirus we thought 10 percent would be a good amount of growth for this year."

The company will bring in both conventional and organic avocados from Peru, and Lucy believes that Del Rey is the largest importer of organic avocados from that South American country. "I believe we will market 30-40 percent of Peru's organic production" destined for the U.S. market, he said.

Del Rey is noted as a leader in the organic avocado sector, also representing a significant portion of California and Mexico's output in that arena.

Like virtually all the other handlers of avocados, Lucy said the trend toward bagging the fruit remains on an upward curve. He said shoppers have especially been drawn to it this year because of the coronavirus and the desire to get in and out of supermarkets as quickly as possible.

"Not just avocados but all bagged produce items are selling well," he said.

While the coronavirus has affected the avocado industry, especially because of the decline in foodservice sales, Lucy said he was "pleasantly surprised" at how well the market has held up.

"Retail has remained amazingly strong throughout the season," he said. "Foodservice, of course, has been well down but we are starting to see the sales eke back as these restaurants reinvent themselves and try to build their businesses back up. It's very sad what happened to many of these small businesses almost overnight."

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