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Western Fresh Marketing adds new items to lineup

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Western Fresh Marketing in Madera, CA, which handles an assortment of products but is perhaps best known for its fresh figs, kiwifruit and Hawaiian papayas, has added several new items to its product line for the fall season.

According to Chris Kragie, deciduous fruit manager, Western Fresh has taken on a large kiwifruit grower in the vicinity of Gridley, CA, which also grows other items that Western Fresh will be marketing, specifically pomegranates and horned melons, also called Kiwano melons.

The company also "will have a fall persimmon deal, which is new to us this year," Mr. Kragie said.

Western Fresh has handled pomegranates in the past in a small way, but it has not done so for several years, Mr. Kragie said. The new program will give the company around 75,000 packages of pomegranates.

"We are going to start between the 15th and 22nd of September," he said. "We are going to have Early Wonderfals" and then "go right into the Wonderfals without a stop."

The horned melon volume will amount to between 6,000 and 8,000 flats this year, he said. The harvest started in early August, "and we will have them all the way through November."

The company's persimmon program will consist of around 35,000 packages this year, "but we are going to try to grow that over the next three or four years to probably about 100,000 boxes," Mr. Kragie said. It will consist of both Fuyu and Hachiya varieties.

Western Fresh added Satsuma tangerines to its program last year, and "we will do probably about 50,000 boxes of Satsumas this year," he said. The harvest was expected to start toward the end of

October.

The company will have an increase in its Asian pear program this fall. "Last year, we had [around] 75,000 [boxes of] Asian pears out of California," Mr. Kragie said. This year, that will be increased to more than 100,000 boxes. "We started two weeks ago, and we will run those until January," he said Aug. 27. "Then we will start our import program out of Chile. We run the Asian pears year round."

Western Fresh will also have an increase in its California kiwifruit volume. "Everybody is thinking it is going to be a down crop," Mr. Kragie said. "But we are up about 15-20 percent," partly because of new growers and partly as a result of an ongoing program "over the last five years" of replanting, "replacing some of the older vines with some new ones." With the replacement plantings, "we're getting some better production," he said. The kiwi harvest will start around the third week of September.

"We are pretty much diversified," Mr. Kragie said. "We have found that the more items we can have underneath one roof, the better it is for us."

In its fresh fig program, Western Fresh continues to see strong growth in demand. A major retailer recently came in "with a major ad with us," Mr. Kragie said. "The growth on the figs has just been outstanding. Because of the economy, we thought we were going to see a decrease in a lot of these items, but so far, it hasn't really affected us."

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