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**Eagle Eye sees pre-COVID movement in retail**

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By

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With the 2021 onion shipping season fully underway in the Treasure Valley, Idaho Falls-based Eagle Eye Produce said it is seeing pre-COVID movement for its retail onions and ongoing recovery in the foodservice sector.

Director of Business Development Joe Ange said foodservice has made a big comeback since the 2020 lockdown, which is good news for the onion industry.

Ange, who is part of the Nyssa, OR, Eagle Eye team, and Director of Onion Sales Jason Pearson both commented on the start of 2021 in mid-September, looking at demand, quality, yields and volume.

Ange said demand is good across the board. “The onion industry relies on the foodservice sector heavily, and our foodservice customers are 90-100 percent back to pre-pandemic levels,” he said. “We’re happy to continue to support our foodservice partners moving forward and we hope this recovery continues.”

Retail, which maintained strong demand during the height of the pandemic, has “normalized back to pre-pandemic levels,” he said. “This time last year we were heading into our first pandemic winter, and there was a lot of uncertainty with strong retail demand.”

With the new season’s good demand and movement, Pearson said there is also a reduction in volume and yields throughout the Treasure Valley.

“As we get further into harvest, we are still seeing yields slightly down with sizes trending smaller due to the less-than-ideal growing season we had in the Pacific Northwest,” Pearson said. “We are seeing an abundance of smaller sizes, but sizing should improve as we get later into the harvest season and into storage crop.”

He continued, “Our volume, along with most in the Pacific Northwest due to the heatwave and lack of moisture, will be down this year from last year where we had ideal growing conditions. Grower/shippers that have a short season to begin with will have an even shorter season this year.”

He said at Eagle Eye, “We have been slowing down slightly to ensure we can keep the steady year-round supply our core customers rely on.” And, he added, “From jumbo sizes and bigger, the industry is tight on larger specs. We expect supply and sizing to improve slightly as we get further into harvest, but we also expect strong markets throughout the year for larger sizes.”

Though sizing and volume are down, quality remains high. Ange said, “Expect the same great quality

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from us this season. We are impressed by our growers and growing partners who worked hard to bring a quality crop to market despite Mother Nature not cooperating.”

And Ange also cited high demand, noting that in the early season the call for reds and yellows “has been excellent so far.” He continued, “Larger sizes across the board are very high in demand. We have a beautiful white onion crop this year, and we could take more demand on them. White onions are more heat tolerant and have handled the heat we have had very well.”

Pearson said on the transportation front, “We have a continued emphasis on rail, while carrier capacity seems to be improving but with high rates due to high fuel costs and other factors. The high rates we saw last holiday season never normalized. Extreme weather conditions like the recent hurricanes and tropical storms have caused some issues as well.” He noted, “We are hoping fuel costs will reduce as we move into the holiday season.”

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