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Strong season expected for blueberries and cherries from Chile

By

Keith Loria

November 18, 2021

Chilean cherries and blueberries are both looking very strong at the end of 2021, according to Karen Brux, managing director of the [Chilean Fresh Fruit Association](#).

In fact, the Chilean Blueberry Committee projects global export volumes of 117,000 tons, similar to the total exported the previous season.

“The season has just started, with 196,000 boxes (563 tons) shipped season to date to the U.S.,” Brux said. “We’ll be promoting from December through February.”

She added that varietal replacement is a reality in Chile, with new varieties reaching 25 percent of total volume. Organic blueberries are also growing in volume, with roughly 18 percent of total exports expected to be organic. The U.S. receives a greater allocation of organic, so organic volume shipped to this market could reach as much as 28 percent of the total.

“The biggest challenges to this season in Chile are the availability of manpower and port logistics,” Brux said. “It is estimated that the lack of labor will reduce the fresh harvest by 7 percent of the potential production. In addition, the impact of logistical difficulties is very difficult to estimate and currently exporters are working intensively on scheduling shipments with shipping companies to minimize this problem that is affecting global trade.”

As far as marketing efforts for blueberries, the Chilean Fresh Fruit Association is excited to be returning to in-store promotions this season and look forward to showcasing the superior flavor of Chilean blueberries through in-store sampling.

“While we will kick off our promotions in late December and continue into early March, we will run numerous in-store and online promotions during February for everything from Valentine’s Day to Heart Health Month to National Pancake Day,” Brux said. “Chilean Blueberries are heart-check certified, so we will be promoting that whenever and wherever possible.”

Turning to cherries, the outlook is just as strong. Chile is the world’s largest exporter of cherries, shipping 77.8 million boxes around the globe last year. Small shipments to the U.S. started during the last week of October, with just 4,550 boxes shipped season to date.

“Chile projects that cherry exports to the U.S. will see substantial growth in 2021-22, and for the first time, the season will run more than 12 weeks, from November through February,” Brux said. “The Chilean Cherry Committee estimates that nearly 13,000 tons will be shipped to the U.S. market during the 2021-22 season.”

She expects volume will continue to ramp up and continue into February and the Chilean Fresh Fruit Association will be promoting from the December holidays through February.

“Retailers love to promote in December, so we provide them with holiday-themed merchandising materials,” Brux said. “We’ll also be working with influencers this year and hosting a large holiday giveaway through our social media channels.”

Its new campaign headline for this season is Cherrish Every Moment, which Brux described as a “fun and playful line that reminds us to enjoy and hold dear the simple everyday moments in life, and by adding cherries to the mix, they become more special. We’re in the process of developing point of sale and social media assets to support this.”

The association undertook a very successful program with Shopkick for Chilean citrus and hopes to implement a similar campaign for cherries.

“Shopkick is a shopping app that offers users rewards for shopping activities both online and in-store, such as watching product videos online, scanning product in-store, making in-store purchases and submitting receipts,” Brux said. “We love it, because shoppers are rewarded for learning about products online and also going to the store and buying them.”

Grapes and stone fruit are also big in Chile, but as of mid-November, the Association didn’t have any estimates or detailed marketing plans for these categories yet, though it hoped to do a Shopkick program for grapes as well.

For Chilean fruit in general, there are certainly numerous challenges, from the ongoing drought and labor shortages in Chile, to port congestion on the West Coast.

“Despite all these obstacles, we just wrapped up successful citrus and kiwifruit seasons,” Brux said. “I’m confident that we’ll be able to provide timely shipments of great quality cherries, blueberries, grapes and stone fruit.”

The Chilean produce deal is more complicated and challenging due, in great part, to competition from other Southern Hemisphere suppliers.

“The demand for premium- quality, great-tasting fruit is clear, and that’s where we’re focused,” Brux said. “Continued strength will come from being market-focused. Also, as retailers and consumers increasingly demand sustainably grown and packaged produce, this will also impact our industry and push everyone to up their game. Evolution is good.”

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