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Ciruli Bros. Champagne mangos aim to stand out from the crowd

By

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The first arrivals of Champagne Mangos from Ciruli Bros. have arrived in the United States, said Chris Ciruli, COO of Ciruli Bros. Operating out of Rio Rico, AZ, Ciruli Bros. is a third-generation grower and shipper, specializing in Champagne mangos.

“We want the fruit on the tree to be at its peak eating point, and then we start harvesting,” said Ciruli. So, while competitors have been harvesting now for a few weeks, “we don’t try to rush it because of the markets, we wait until we see the right maturity in the fruit and then we go.”



CEO Chuck

Ciruli III; Frankie and Sammy Ciruli, sons of COO Chris Ciruli; and Chuck Ciruli II, chairman.

Ciruli and the team will go nonstop with Champagne mangos until Easter, with promotable volume stretching into July.

Champagnes mangos are of the Atualfo variety, known for its delectable, fiber-free taste-profile. They are generally smaller in size than the Tommy Atkins varietal, more commonly found in the U.S. supermarkets.

Ciruli Bros. has been in the mango business since the mid 80s, starting with the Haden variety. “We created some really great eating Hadens that we were bringing into the United States,” Ciruli said, “but wanted to get separation from other mangos coming across the border.”

“We were looking to stand out,” said Ciruli, speaking of Champagnes. “When you have 80-million boxes of mangos coming from Mexico, we’re trying to be in the top tier.” Ciruli Bros. isn’t trying to be the largest U.S. shipper, “we’re interested in bringing the most consistent, highest quality mango to our end user,” said Ciruli.

“I would say the main difference is just a commitment to quality,” said Ciruli. “Giving the customer that delight, repeatedly.” For the team at Ciruli Bros., there are a lot of factors that go into producing a high-quality product. “One difference is the later picking,” Ciruli said. “On average, we pick a field four-to-five times a year, where competitors may strip a whole field in one pick. You’re not hand selecting for the best variety, you’re just trying to create a cheap harvest and we’re not into that.

“Champagne is our niche,” added Ciruli. “We’ve followed that track for a lot of years — bring in high-quality mangos — and it’s worked for our company.” This is Ciruli’s twenty-first season with its Champagne brand.

While consumers already expect to pay a premium for Champagne mangos, inflation has notably driven fruit prices up. “That’s the theme of this year, unfortunately everything went up, cardboard, freight, labor,” said Ciruli, “but retailers and consumers get it, we all know the same story, and for us that’s the importance of having a high-end eating experience in Champagnes.”

Trucking costs have also gone up. “We’ve definitely had to pay more, but we haven’t been without,” said Ciruli. “We’re a multi-generational business and have been doing this for a long time, and a lot of our regular truckers are the same way.” There’s trust and fidelity in this business, “we’ve worked with a father, now we’re working with his son, so we try to build relationships with local guys.” Ciruli noted that since getting past the last few holiday pushes they are beginning to see more standardization or normalization of freight lanes.

As for the future, one of the biggest industry trends to emerge over the past two years is the higher demand for packaged goods. “We’re seeing a higher demand on four packs and six packs and we’re selling more non-traditional retail channels,” he said. “The home delivery business has just exploded, and it’s a great way to connect with customers, given the additional branding opportunity on packaged goods.”

Whatever the challenge may be, the team at Ciruli Bros. is excited for Champagne mango season. “Our goal is that our retail partners feel that we have a commitment to them, that we communicate well, and execute,” said Ciruli. “You put all those different steps together, and it gives you a superior product at the retail experience.”