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**Strong early market price greets California avocado season**

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By

Tim Linden

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Buoyed by a hot market, California avocado growers started picking their 2022 crop earlier than expected. By the end of March, they will have already shipped about 20 percent of their expected volume for the season.

The [California Avocado Commission](#)'s pre-season estimate for the 2022 season was slightly greater than 300 million pounds, which represents about 15 percent more fruit than in 2021. The crop was expected to start with relatively few shipments in January, a few million pounds per week in February with steady increases in March, but no peak-type shipping weeks until April. Veteran industry experts predicted that 70-80 percent of the crop would be marketed in the four-month period stretching from April through July.

Instead, more than 5 million pounds were harvested in California both the last week of January and the first week of February. During the last week of February, more than 8 million pounds were sent to market and in the month of March, about 7 million were harvested each week.

With 20 percent of the fruit already off the trees, it appears that the peak is going to come a bit earlier and that summer volume will probably be lighter, on a weekly basis, than first anticipated.

Rob Wedin, executive vice president of Calavo Growers Inc., based in Santa Paula, CA, said the peak of the season could come in late April. "The early shipments have definitely taken the edge off the marketing situation for summer," he said in mid-March.

Jan DeLyser, vice president of marketing for CAC, noted that there are always growers that wait until September and October to pick their trees as a strategic move designed to capitalize on a potentially good market as California runs out of locally grown avocados.

With regard to the market, Wedin added that it could very well be an excellent year for California growers for the entire season. He did point out that the state's avocado producing regions have received virtually no rain in this calendar year, which impacts growers negatively in a couple of ways. In the first place, lack of rain means extra reliance on irrigation water, which means significantly greater costs.

The lack of rain, along with the early harvesting, may also make it difficult to reach the pre-season crop estimate of 306 million pounds. There is nothing like rainwater to create a healthy grove and increase the size of the fruit. Avocados tend to increase in size as it is left on the tree. Early harvesting takes fruit off the trees before they reach their full size. Ultimately, that could reduce overall tonnage. Of course, that's not a bad trade-off when getting top dollar for the fruit. Wedin did say that the volume estimate still looked like it was on target, though a couple of more months without rain might change that.

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The f.o.b. price was in the high \$40s to low \$50s in January when growers began picking early to capture the heavy demand leading up to the Super Bowl. The Saturday night prior to pro football's championship game, the U.S. Department of Agriculture suspended shipments from Mexico, for what would be a week, because of threats to a USDA inspector. That one-week hiatus gave uncertainty the supply situation, which further raised the market. There have been a few adjustments since, but it is holding very strong.

On Monday, March 14, Wedin said Mexico's growers appeared to be holding down harvest numbers a bit to keep the market strong, and that tactic was working. He said on that day that California's most popular — a 48 size avocado — was in the low \$60s and appeared that the market would hold as demand was very brisk. He did note that there was a quite a bit of smaller fruit on the market so there was a big gap as the price for 60s was about \$11 less, but that was still a very good price.

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## About Tim Linden |

Tim Linden grew up in a produce family as both his father and grandfather spent their business careers on the wholesale terminal markets in San Francisco and Los Angeles.

Tim graduated from San Diego State University in 1974 with a degree in journalism. Shortly thereafter he began his career at The Packer where he stayed for eight years, leaving in 1983 to join Western Growers as editor of its monthly magazine. In 1986, Tim launched Champ Publishing as an agricultural publishing specialty company.

Today he is a contract publisher for several trade associations and writes extensively on all aspects of the produce business. He began writing for The Produce News in 1997, and currently wears the title of Editor at Large.

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