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California Table Grape Commission working to foster strong grape program

By

Keith Loria

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Since its establishment in 1967, the [California Table Grape Commission](#) has assisted California table grape growers to create and expand markets for each season's crop. The 2022 initiative continued the work to foster demand for California table grapes around the world through the fielding of a robust global marketing campaign targeting the U.S. which consumed 76 percent of the 2021 volume, and 16 foreign markets that together represented 95% of export volume June through December 2021.

"Grapes are an exceptionally important commodity for the state of California where agriculture is the backbone of the economy," said Kathleen Nave, president and CEO for the Fresno, CA-based commission. "Together, the Coachella and San Joaquin valleys of California grow 99 percent of all domestically produced table grapes in the country. In 2021, California produced 95.2 million 19-pound boxes of grapes valued at over \$2.1 billion."

There are more than 80 varieties of table grapes grown in California, each with unique characteristics and timing. The top 15 varieties account for 76 percent of the volume. Among those, the top five volume varieties are Autumn King, Scarlet Royal, Sheegene-20, Flame Seedless, and Sheegene-21.

"Top issues of concern to table grape growers revolve around the high costs of production, access to water and labor, packaging and shipping costs, and import competition," Nave said.

The California Table Grape Commission can do a great number of things to help growers, ranging from new variety development to innovation in the area of mechanization and automation to consumer advertising and digital promotion to influencer promotion and a focus on creating a demand-oriented retail environment into which California table grape growers can sell their product.

"Fostering the demand for California table grapes through multiple channels is ongoing," Nave said. "This year, the commission is significantly increasing its commitment to digital promotion such as shopper apps and couponing."

Harvest is in full swing in the San Joaquin Valley and by all reports is going well. The current projection is for a crop comparable in size to last season.

"Retailers can maximize grape display space, add additional display locations, and increase grape variety offerings," Nave said. "Digital promotions can also be used to motivate ecommerce sales with reminders to add California grapes to online shopping carts or to offer coupons or loyalty awards for purchase. Grape photography used in online promotion should reference local, California, or include the Grapes from California logo."

A new set of videos, called California Goodness, has been released by the commission that

highlights core industry values and can be viewed on YouTube.

A U.S. Usage Tracking Custom Online Survey 2021, reported that primary shoppers 25-73 consider grapes priced at \$2.61 to be a reasonable price, up from \$2.07 in 2019. This demonstrates that consumers are willing to pay a higher price for grapes at retail which in turn means retailers can afford to pay a higher price to growers, something that is necessary for financial viability.

Brett Dixon, president of the Bakersfield, CA-based Top Brass and Vignolo Farms, noted the costs related to farming in California continue to be a challenge as does general water availability due to the long-term drought conditions.

“All markets are feeling unprecedented cost pressures this year and grapes are no exception,” he said. “We anticipate the same with the upcoming grape season. Increased transportation costs coupled with logistical complexities are creating challenges for everyone from growers to distributors to retailers. As a fourth-generation family farming company we understand that we need to work closely with our partners to ensure that they are getting the highest quality produce available at a fair and reasonable cost.”

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About Keith Loria |

A graduate of the University of Miami, Keith Loria is a D.C.-based award-winning journalist who has been writing for major publications for close to 20 years on topics as diverse as real estate, food and sports. He started his career with the Associated Press and has held high editorial positions at magazines aimed at healthcare, sports and technology. When not busy writing, he can be found enjoying time with his wife, Patricia, and two daughters, Jordan and Cassidy.

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