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Cost, improved service change Peru asparagus shipments

By

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In years gone by, U.S. importers of Peruvian asparagus would often compete, touting the freshness of their product because they brought the product into the United States via air rather than ocean. That is rarely the case today as ocean shipments dominate the space.

“Ten years ago, 10 percent of the volume was shipped by ocean and 90 percent by air,” said Walter Yager, president of Alpine Fresh. “This year, I expect 80 percent by ocean and 20 percent by air.”

He noted that even though the cost of ocean containers is up 30 percent this year, it is still much more affordable than shipping by air. “The cost of air freight is prohibitive,” he said.

Farm Direct Supply General Manager Chris Horrell agreed, noting that ocean shipments continue to increase, caused by the general disruption of the air cargo industry. That disruption is the result of both higher costs and fewer flights because of the pandemic.

Tracy Wood of Seven Seas said the lack of air cargo space is a legitimate reason for the decline in air shipments, but it is also tied to improvements in the ocean voyage. “Now it’s an eight or nine day ride,” he said. “It used to be a 12-day ride.”

Charlie Eagle, vice president of business development for Southern Specialties, made the same point. “Over the past several years the infrastructure for boat transport has greatly improved. Boat transport has proven to yield reliably good product.”

Veteran customs broker Patricia Compres of Advance Customs Brokers & Consulting LLC remembers when it took up to two weeks for an ocean freighter to make the trek from Peru to Miami. Today, she said it can get to Miami in eight days, is less expensive and there is much more available space.

But Paul Auerbach, president of Maurice A. Auerbach Inc., is old school and still touts the freshness of the air shipments. He admits that air space is limited and ocean shipments are taking over, “but we are one of the few importers that still bring in quite a bit by air.”

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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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