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Chile eyeing big increase in cherry exports

By

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With fall getting deep into its season, it's about time for winter fruit from Chile to start arriving in the United States, with fresh cherries currently attracting the most buzz.

"The big news this year is Chilean cherries," said Karen Brux, managing director of the U.S. office of the [Chilean Fresh Fruit Association](#). "We're expecting a huge increase in volume to the U.S. market, and we'll be launching an expanded marketing program encompassing both retail and consumer promotions."

She noted that the marketing campaign encourages consumers to "Cherrish Every Moment" with "Cherries from Chile." CFFA is spreading this message through POS material, retail ads, social media posts and a radio campaign in selected U.S. cities.

"For the first time ever, we're also designing and producing retail bins for cherries," she said, adding that promotable volumes are expected in January and February.

Chile has become a major supplier of Southern Hemisphere cherries, supplying 96 percent of the world's counter-seasonal supply, according to Brux. Chile exported more than 356,000 tons of cherries globally during the 2021-22 season. "To give you a clearer picture of the phenomenal growth that has taken place, Chile exported 179,927 tons in 2018-19, so that's 98 percent growth in just three years," she said. "And the industry is projecting another 25 percent increase this season."

China is the No. 1 export destination for Chilean cherries, but the CFFA executive revealed that Chile's exporters are working hard to develop world markets and reduce their dependency on the Chinese market. "In the 2021-22 season, cherry exports to the United States grew by 94 percent, clearly demonstrating the industry's strategy to diversify its export markets," Brux said. "We expect exports to the U.S. to double again in the 2022-23 season."

She added that growers are predicting an excellent crop due to favorable climatic conditions in Chile during its winter, including more rainfall in comparison to the previous season.

Chilean Table Grapes

For several decades, Chile has had a robust table grape crop that it ships around the world with North America being its top market. During the 2021-22 season, Chile sent more than 320,000 tons of grapes to North America, which represented 53 percent of total global grape exports. This year's crop is estimated to fall about 7.7 percent short of last season, but the big news is the percentage of new varieties. According to CFFA's Chilean office, for the first time ever, more than 50 percent of the volume exported will be of new varieties.

"For 10 years, the Chilean table grape sector has been promoting the planting of new varieties as a

way to improve the competitiveness of grapes in international markets, responding to market and consumer requirements,” according to the organization.

With the volume advance of the new varieties above 50 percent, grape industry leaders in Chile believe that an important milestone will be met. “This season Chile will export more than 36 million boxes of grapes of new varieties. This means a growth of 14 percent, or 4.7 million additional boxes, which shows that the varietal replacement in the industry is a reality, even more considering the decrease in traditional varieties by 25 percent, or more than 10 million boxes, versus last season,” the organization added.

The Chilean grape industry is projecting that of the new varieties to be exported, 48 percent will be red, 39 percent white and 13 percent black. The growth in the volume of new variety grapes is being driven by white varieties, with the volume of that category expected to increase by about 5 million boxes from 9 million to 14 million. New red varieties still dominate at about 18 million boxes, but that is very similar to last season. The volume of new black varieties is estimated at 4.6 million boxes this season, which represents about a 7 percent decrease from 2021-22.

In terms of specific varieties, Timco and Allison are expected to be down in volume from the 2021-22 season, while four other white varieties — Arra 15, Sweet Globe, Timspon and Autumn Crisp — account for most of the growth. Collectively, those four varieties are anticipating shipping more than 11 million boxes, representing 92 percent of the new variety growth.

Chilean Blueberries

In mid-October, the Chilean Blueberry Committee estimated a volume of 98,228 tons of fresh blueberries from Chile for the 2022-23 season. Shipments to the U.S. market have begun and will continue through February. If the estimate is reached, it will represent an 8 percent decrease for the 2021-22 season.

The committee said the decrease in volume is the direct result of the “Chilean blueberry industry’s intense focus on providing only the best quality blueberries to its export markets.”

The committee further noted that, “extensive variety renewal, with some varieties being shifted into frozen exports and other industrial uses is ongoing and decreasing total volume of exports to the fresh market. At the same time, growers are planting new varieties with better post-harvest conditions that will allow the fruit to arrive with the full flavor and sweetness characteristic of Chilean blueberries.”

Andres Armstrong, executive director of the Chilean Blueberry Committee, said, “Our No. 1 priority is delivering the highest quality blueberries to our international markets. Planting and exporting the right varieties are key, but the industry is also strengthening logistics through new programs like the Blueberry Express,” he said, explaining that the service will begin in week 49 and continue throughout the 2022-23 season, with less than two weeks transit time to the U.S. market.

The industry is anticipating better conditions for the export of fresh blueberries this season. The committee reported that cooler temperatures have enhanced fruit quality, and greater availability of labor for harvesting, packing and logistics operations, which were factors that made last season challenging.

The United States is Chile’s main market for fresh blueberries, receiving 54 percent of total volume. Chile also ships 75 percent of all fresh organic blueberries to the U.S.

With peak arrivals expected around the last week of December/first week of January, the U.S. marketing team is working with retail chains to design programs that will drive Chilean blueberry sales. Trade promotions are expected to commence by early January and continue through February.

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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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