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Rio Grande Valley winter veg crops off a bit

By

Tim Linden

November 21, 2022

A warm, dry summer with limited rain reduced acreage for some of the typical Rio Grande Valley winter crops, but the growing weather has been excellent for creating top quality production.

At least that was the report from Dante Galeazzi, president and CEO of the [Texas International Produce Association](#). “We’ve seen a decrease in acreage in some of our plantings, including onions, cabbage and greens,” he said. “But those same conditions that reduced acreage are great growing conditions. Because of that, quality should be excellent.”

Of course, the most noted crop coming out of South Texas at this time of year is its sweet red grapefruit, and that situation is bringing smiles to the faces of growers up and down the valley. “It looks like we are going to have 65 to 70 percent of a normal crop,” Galeazzi said.

Considering the situation of the last two seasons, that is good news indeed. On Valentine’s Day (Feb. 14) of 2021, the valley was hit with a killer freeze that ended production for the 2020-21 season and greatly limited supplies for the 2021-22 season. “We only had 30 percent of a crop last year so to reach 65-70 percent this year is great,” he said. “We started about three weeks ago (late October). Volume is light but in about two weeks it should start picking up.”

The TIPA executive said a very interesting marketing situation appears to be on tap for the 2022-23 season.

“Two hurricanes recently went through Florida and that has impacted the grapefruit market. They are still determining how big of an impact that will cause, but we do think that grapefruit supplies will be tight.”

Galeazzi said while some sizes will be very short and expensive, there should be some promotional opportunities as the season progresses. He added that shippers and retailers will have to get creative, but there should be the potential to combine sizes to get a good promotion on the books.

While reiterating that fall/winter vegetable crops, including herbs and wet vegetable commodities, will be tight, Galeazzi said some solid Rio Grande Valley rain, which was in the forecast for mid-November as he was being interviewed, could change the situation moving forward. “I think we will see some increased plantings that could be harvested in the January-to-April time frame.”

Most South Texas produce operations also rely on supplies from south of the border to fill out their sales sheets, and Galeazzi said the Mexican vegetable season appears to be on track for another good year. “We’ve seen a bit of strengthening in the tomato market and we expect the transition to the squashes and eggplant and other winter vegetables to start soon.”

During this Nov. 15 interview, Galeazzi and his staff were working on the annual skeet shoot networking event it was handling for TIPA members later in the week and also starting to plan in earnest for the 2023 Viva Fresh, which will be held in Dallas beginning March 30.

TIPA has limited that popular show to 200 booths for the past few years and that will again be the case this year. But even though booth sales are limited, he said they do allow for 10-15 new booth participants each year.

“And we continually make sure that 100 percent of exhibitors run their business through this area, and they include a good mix of commodities,” he said.

With the November election results still coming in as he spoke, Galeazzi said he looked forward to working with the new U.S. Congress on many issues including immigration reform. While that particularly thorny issue has eluded progress for the past two decades, Galeazzi remained optimistic.

“Every new Congress offers a new opportunity,” he said. “It doesn’t matter if Democrats or Republicans are in charge, immigration reform has been stymied, but we have a new opportunity.”

Galeazzi said that 2023 is a farm bill year, as it is every five years. And on that issue, control of the two chambers is never an issue as the farm bill enjoys bipartisan support.

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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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