



- Advertisement -

California is in for an interesting avocado season

By

Tim Linden, editor at large

March 23, 2023

Although the California avocado crop is smaller than last year, the 2023 marketing situation is much different than in 2022, and moving this year's volume through the supply chain will create its own challenges. That seems to be the overarching view of several grower-shippers interviewed on the subject.

"The California avocado season is off to a slow start," said Patrick Lucy, president of Del Rey Avocado Co. in Fallbrook, CA. "Because of the weather – we've had weeks of rain and wet groves – there has been a delay in the harvest."

As of mid-March, only about 1 percent of the projected volume of 257 million pounds had been shipped, compared to more than 50 million at a similar date in 2022. "That means we are going to have a smaller window in which to sell the crop," he said.

Lucy calculated that because of the capacity of the packing sheds and the availability of labor, California can only put about 12-13 million pounds of fruit into the market in any give week. "To move this crop we are going to have to be at maximum capacity from April 1 to July 31."

He did note that the later start will allow the crop to be marketed past July into late summer and into fall but the vast majority will have to be moved during that April to July time frame.

While the rain is a great stimulant for the fruit and helps increase the size of individual pieces, Lucy said the colder than usual weather has delayed that growth. Some warm weather, which wasn't in the immediate forecast in mid-March, is needed to size that crop and enhance its marketability.

Lucy said the rainy weather does point to a season of very good volume in 2024. "We'll need a good bloom and the cold weather has delayed that but the rain has been great for the trees. Most trees haven't been healthier in years," he said. "We could see a 350 to 400 million pound crop next year."

On March 7, Peter Shore, vice president of product management for Calavo Growers in Santa Paula, CA, said Calavo was picking fruit but very little. "We expect volume to gradually increase throughout the month but it still should be light until late March or early April."

He added that the later start will allow Calavo to have good volume until at least late summer. "April, May, June and into July should be the peak shipping period, but we do expect to push some fruit into September."

Shore said the stretching of the season from March well into September will allow those customers who love California fruit to have it for an extended period of time. It should also help the California avocado be in strong demand throughout its season. "We see good demand for avocado sales in the

second quarter, increasing as we move from spring into summer.”

He added that the delayed start should help size the fruit and create a larger size portfolio. Shore predicted there would be a greater volume of 48s and larger this season for retailers to promote. While the 2023 FOB price has been much lower than last year because of strong supplies of imported product, the pricing is creating very good opportunities for retail promotions. “There is definitely a good supply of avocados out there and retailers are promoting the crop very well,” he said. “We expect good promotions leading up to Cinco de Mayo and continuing through Memorial Day and into the summer.”

He also mentioned that there will be a relatively good supply of both Lamb Hass and the newer GEM variety of avocados this season. Both varieties have become popular among growers because of their ability to support higher density plantings and produce larger fruit that matures later in the season. “In July we expect to see a pretty steady supply of these varieties,” he said.

Index Fresh Vice President of Sales Debbie Willmann agreed that this year is different. “As this season is starting with much different market conditions than last year, along with unusual weather delays, we anticipate growers will harvest with limited volumes in March, increase weekly volumes in April, and hit peak harvesting in the months of May and June.”

Though most California fruit will be sold relatively close to home, Willmann said support for the California Avocado brand goes beyond the state’s borders. “There is a loyal customer base for California Grown, or locally grown, that spans the entire West Coast up to Washington, and that includes neighboring states such as Arizona, Nevada and Idaho,” she said.

Carson McDaniel, vice president for McDaniel Fruit Co. in Fallbrook, CA, articulated that there are three main reasons that the 2023 California avocado seasons is being delayed: rain, delayed sizing of the fruit and market dynamics. “We have had an historically wet winter and growers can’t get into their groves,” he said, adding that on the plus sides that has greatly reduced their cost of irrigating the crop, which is typically their largest expense.

He said the cold weather has also delayed the sizing of the fruit, which makes growers very reluctant to pick. “They need to maximize their tonnage by allowing the fruit to size,” he said. “We need some heat to grow the fruit.”

Conversely, in early 2022, the FOB market price on avocados was so high that growers rushed to the field to harvest that crop not worrying about the size of the fruit as they took advantage of some record farmgate pricing.

It was that market dynamic that existed last year that is not in place yet this year. With lower prices being paid in the grove for a grower’s crop, there is no rush to harvest.

In mid-March, McDaniel predicted that it will be mid-April before there a steady supply of California fruit on the market. “Historically, the California crop is available for Cinco de Mayo,” he said. “We are expecting volume to increase in mid-April and we should have peak volume May, June and July and into August.”

He was buoyed by the mid-March FOB price, which was on the rise. “We are seeing an uptick in the market driven by Mexico volume,” he said. “I think there will be stability in the market for the coming weeks.”

[Tim Linden](#)

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.

[Print](#)