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Leger & Son expects tighter supply of watermelons this summer

By

John Groh, publisher

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In the farming world, each year presents new challenges and new opportunities. For [Leger & Son](#), the challenges and opportunities this season revolve around a tighter supply of watermelons.

Jordan Carter, director of marketing for the Cordele, GA-based watermelon grower, said warm weather early in the season in south Florida resulted in an early start to watermelon harvest. This will likely cause a supply gap later on in the Florida deal and timing for the rest of the season could be thrown off the typical schedules.

“We just started harvest in Florida this past week,” she told The Produce News on May 5.

Carter said Leger, which exclusively handles domestic watermelon, typically ships from early May through around Sept. 15. Harvest begins in Florida and runs for about a month, while the deal moves up to Georgia around June 5 and runs there until mid-July. After that, Leger transitions production to Vincennes, IN, where it finishes out the season.

Carter explained that an early end to the south Florida deal could leave limited supplies, but they will pick up again when Georgia starts. Further complicating matters is a recent hailstorm in Central Florida, which affected a large swath of farmland in the region, including watermelon fields.

While she acknowledged that lower supplies could help prop up watermelon prices, she would prefer a more predictable season with less volatility.

“What we hope for most is a stable market and good returns, so that we can continue to invest in our farm,” she said. “As it is now, it will be a challenge to meet demand for fruit early this summer. But we will be completely transparent with our customers and let them know the situation so there are no surprises for them.”

Carter said one benefit so far this year has been a moderation of the rising cost of inputs, which had plagued produce growers for the last few years due to pandemic-related supply chain issues.

“It is true that input costs are down this year on things like pallets and cardboard, so that helps,” she said. “But we’re still seeing extremely high costs on labor, so that is still challenging.”

Leger & Son is focused on large seedless watermelons, according to Carter. “We don’t grow any mini or personal-sized melons,” she said. “They are very labor-intensive, and in my opinion, they do not provide the same eating experience as the large fruit.”

However, she acknowledged that consumer preferences have shifted over the years and personal-

sized melons are becoming even more popular, so Leger may explore devoting some acreage to them in the future.

Carter, a former president of the National Watermelon Promotion Board, said the board does an outstanding job promoting its namesake fruit.

“The NWPB staff does an outstanding job of boosting the profile of watermelons in creative and fun ways,” she said. “Also, the National Watermelon Association does a great job in keeping the industry updated on all of the issues that affect the growers. I am always grateful for what those two organizations do to help the industry.”

[John Groh](#)

About John Groh |

John Groh graduated from the University of San Diego in 1989 with a bachelors of arts degree in English. Following a brief stint as a sportswriter covering the New York Giants football team, he joined The Produce News in 1995 as an assistant editor and worked his way up the ranks, becoming publisher in 2006. He and his wife, Mary Anne, live in northern New Jersey in the suburbs of New York City.

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