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Chilean citrus forecast dips, but stays well above last season

Following the recent frosts and rains in Chile, the Citrus Committee of the Chilean Fruit Exporters Association has revised its export projections for the 2023-24 season. The committee estimates that Chile will export 348,000 tons of citrus, 30 percent more than last year, but 3 percent lower than the previous estimate made in May of 2023.

“The frost damage to citrus was quite limited, but there are some sectors of orchards that suffered damage, mainly in the O'Higgins region,” said Juan Enrique Ortúzar, president of the Chilean Citrus Committee.

Regarding the rains, Ortúzar said the effect on citrus, in general, is positive: “Even though harvesting had to be stopped for a few days, we now have a guarantee of some water supply for this winter when irrigation canals must be cleaned. There were some orchards that suffered flooding because they were in low-lying areas, but nothing major.”

The first estimates this April indicated an export volume for Clementines of 55,000 tons, 125,000 tons for mandarins, 95,000 tons for oranges and 75,000 tons for lemons. In May, the mandarin volume estimate was updated to 135,000 tons. The latest projection indicates a small increase in clementine volume to 58,000 tons and a decrease for mandarins to 125,000 tons. The orange estimate remains unchanged, while lemons have decreased to 70,000 tons.

Monserrat Valenzuela, manager of the Chilean Citrus Committee, said that “the estimated volumes will always have some fluctuations due to external factors such as weather conditions, freight costs, logistics, market issues, etc.” She also said the Citrus Committee is committed to “updating estimates throughout the season so that customers around the world can receive accurate, timely information and adjust their programs accordingly.”

The committee has a work plan (frost action manual) to prevent the export of frost-damaged fruit. This includes the installation of thermographs in the orchards and the temporary suspension of harvesting in the affected orchards or sectors until the fruit is checked and it is confirmed that it complies with the corresponding export tolerances, says Valenzuela.

As of the week of June 19, clementine exports had reached 51,474 tons, which is 76 percent more than the same period of the 2022 season. Mandarin shipments are just starting, with 59 tons exported so far this season. Chile has shipped 11,014 tons of oranges, 45 percent more than the same period last season. Lemons are the only category with a slight decrease in season-to-date shipments, with an exported volume of 14,287 tons, a 5 percent decrease from last year.

Chilean Citrus promotions are ongoing throughout the U.S. Retailers interested in promoting are encouraged to contact their regional merchandiser.