



**- Advertisement -**

**Wada expects watermelons to rebound this summer**

---

By

Keith Loria

May 17, 2024

While family-owned [Wada Farms](#) is known for being one of the nation's largest suppliers of fresh potatoes, onions and sweet potatoes, the company also continues to be a go-to name in watermelons.

What started as a niche program located in North Carolina has now become a strategic alliance of grower partners in Florida, Georgia, Alabama, South Carolina, North Carolina, Delaware, Michigan, Indiana, Missouri, Arkansas, Oklahoma and Texas.

Additionally, Wada Farms has developed grower partnerships in Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras and Costa Rica to enable a year-round supply of watermelon.

Even so, things are not at its best in the watermelon trade right now.

“As it relates to watermelon, 2024 has been less than stellar and that’s not because of the demand or potential business, it has been because of a lack of supply,” said Fran Torigian, vice president of sales and business development for Wada Farms’ Eastern division. “This whole off shore melon deal from Central America really was a bust. There was nothing left over, and a lot of the contract business was not fulfilled mostly because of the whiteflies virus down in Honduras and Guatemala.”

In early May, there should be off shore melons available, but there are hardly any at all.

“In Mexico, even the districts we usually source from with our growers have been way off,” Torigian said. “In some cases, as much as 50-75 percent off because of weather-related issues and virus. That’s not just for Wada Farms, it’s for the whole industry.”

Wada Farms has started off with what Torigian describes as a “tough deal” in Florida this spring, again with problems due to the viruses.

“Plus, some seed varieties are not bringing on the maturity into the watermelons, and are sitting out

---

in the fields for a long time, more than normal,” Torigian said. “We’ve got some really crazy markets with high prices, and that’s been what we’re seeing.”

In fact, prices reached \$500 per bin this winter, which were previously unheard of.

“We see in the next few weeks that Central Florida should start up, and things will probably be a lot better for the supply level,” Torigian said. “Mexico is starting to pick up with volume finally, and even Texas is starting here within the next week. So, we could be in a situation where we have more watermelon than we know what to do with, but we just don’t know, but there is good optimism.”

Approximately 70 percent of Wada Farms’ watermelon business is for retail, followed by 20 percent to the foodservice industry and the remaining 10 percent for the wholesale market.

There are many varieties within the watermelon category, many with numbered varieties that have yet to receive a name, but some of those that Wada Farms selects and chooses for its program are based on bricks, the consistency of the internal color of the watermelon and that the melon holds up to be firm.

“One of the worst things about a watermelon is when you take a bite and the crunch is not there, so a lot of these varieties out there are taking away from that being a bad attribute,” Torigian said. “We like to improve the eating experience.”

[Keith Loria](#)

---

## About Keith Loria |

A graduate of the University of Miami, Keith Loria is a D.C.-based award-winning journalist who has been writing for major publications for close to 20 years on topics as diverse as real estate, food and sports. He started his career with the Associated Press and has held high editorial positions at magazines aimed at healthcare, sports and technology. When not busy writing, he can be found enjoying time with his wife, Patricia, and two daughters, Jordan and Cassidy.

[Print](#)