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## **Despite industry downturn, Western Fresh kiwifruit volume on par with 2011**

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California's kiwifruit industry expects volume decreases on the order of approximately 20 percent this season. Chris Kragie, deciduous fruit manager for Western Fresh Marketing in Madera, CA, said difficult weather is responsible for some of the impact to the 2012 crop.

"As an industry we have been hit by freeze and hail this growing season," Mr. Kragie told The Produce News on Sept. 5. "This has created some loss in the orchards."



Chris Kragie is the deciduous fruit manager for Western Fresh Marketing. Western Fresh Marketing was created in 1994, representing the growers of fancy imported and domestic fruits. In addition to kiwifruit, the company markets figs, Hawaiian tropicals, specialty citrus, olives, Asian pears, pomegranates, persimmons, sugar plums, onions and ginger. Commodities are marketed to upscale retailers and wholesalers throughout the United States and Canada.

The company is a year-round marketer of kiwifruit selling product under the “Western Fresh” and “Krazie Kiwi” labels. Western Fresh has business relationships in place allowing for the import of top-quality kiwifruit grown in Chile. Product is also sourced from Italy. “We will have Chilean fruit until the first weeks of October at very competitive pricing,” Mr. Kragie said. “We will start our Italian kiwi imports around the first weeks on November.” Italian kiwifruit volume is also anticipated to be down approximately 20 percent this season.

Domestically, Western Fresh works with a network of kiwifruit growers ranging from Bakersfield, CA, in the south to the California-Oregon border in the north. “We will start harvesting the last week of September or the first week of October,” he went on to say. “This is about one to two weeks later than last year. We are doing this because of the shorter crop and increased amount of Chilean fruit here and on its way here over the next two weeks.”

The company expects to have a kiwifruit volume similar to last year’s. “We should be equal to last year due to younger orchards,” Mr. Kragie said. Last season, Western Fresh marketed roughly 300,000 nine-kilo volume-fill equivalents. Domestic kiwifruit is generally available through the beginning of April.

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