

REPORT

—Turkish lemons



Early window under threat

ADANA—An expected decline in early Interdonato lemons from Turkey has exporters concerned about prices and relying on a shortfall from the Southern Hemisphere.

by Tom Joyce

Turkish exporters face an anxious wait to discover what the lemon campaign will hold this autumn following a harsh winter across the country. The season usually begins in mid-September with the early Interdonato crop, but citrus-growing regions in Turkey have experienced winter temperatures of -8°C and -9°C, leading to a marked decline in production.

"Unfortunately, it looks like the early Interdonato crop will be down by around 70 per cent," says Ayşe Özler of Özler Ziraat. "It's a serious loss and will have a huge effect on the global lemon market."

Interdonato may account for just 20 per cent of Turkey's total lemon crop, but since it is the earliest variety available from the Northern Hemisphere, it has added significance. "The majority of Turkish lemons come later,

between December and April, but with the Interdonato, Turkey is able to fill the gap between the Southern Hemisphere crop and US production," says Özler. "It is therefore very big everywhere, in Europe, the Middle East and Asia. In East Asia, we send to Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia and, more recently, Indonesia, which has become a huge buyer of Turkish lemons."

However, concerns surround the likely price of a short Interdonato crop. "There will be very few fruits available, and big sizes too, with a lack of smaller ones," says Özler. "The prices demanded by the growers will therefore be higher, which is a worry for exporters."

The concern is understandable. According to Özler, prices of Interdonato lemons have increased over the past three years despite normal harvests. "That is partly down to their popularity," she says. "So we can't imagine what price level will be demanded this season. At the moment, we don't know. We will have to wait until September."

The price also depends on the availability of fruit from Argentina

and South Africa. In previous seasons, these origins have been short in September and October, but if they still have good availability by the time the Interdonato arrives, then competition will prove tough.

"Despite the elevated prices, demand for Interdonato lemons has been good in all our markets, in Europe, the Middle East and East Asia," says Özler. "This is because the supply from the Southern Hemisphere was short. This season, we will have to wait and see what volumes are still coming in." **E**



TOP—Lemon production is expected to be down in Turkey after a chilly winter
ABOVE—Ayşe Özler of Özler Ziraat

REPORT

—Lemons

Spanish Vernas bounce back

MURCIA—Southern Hemisphere lemons are being squeezed out of the European market as Spanish output continues to climb.

by Maura Maxwell

The European lemon market will be considerably more crowded this summer following a sharp rise in Spanish Verna production.

The latest estimates from Ailimpo suggest the Verna crop is on course to reach 300,000 tonnes compared with 193,680 tonnes in 2016. "This is because of higher rainfall this winter and new farms entering production," explains Ailimpo's director, José Antonio García.

He notes that the early end to Turkey's Verna campaign following its well-publicised issues with pesticide residues, has allowed Spain to dominate the spring and early summer market, leaving little room for Southern Hemisphere arrivals. "Southern Hemisphere suppliers will have a very limited window this year of just four to six weeks," he predicts.

Far from being an anomaly, this pattern looks set to become the new norm as 300,000 tonnes will be the average size of the Spanish Verna crop in the future according to García.

In order to keep pressure on the market to a minimum, he believes the industry associations in Spain, Argentina and South Africa will have to communicate more effectively with one another in order to properly analyse and act upon consumption trends.

At the same time, Spain must ensure that it continues to differentiate its lemon offer from that of its competitors. "Spain's key advantage is that it takes just 72 hours from harvesting for lemons to arrive on supermarket shelves, guaranteeing absolute freshness," García says. "And of course they comply with all the necessary certification requirements such as GlobalGAP and GRASP."

García welcomes the EU's decision to impose tighter controls on Turkish lemons following a spate of interceptions found to exceed maximum residue levels, insisting it was motivated by safety rather than limiting competition.

"This is a very serious issue. Compliance with EU regulations on MRLs should be non negotiable," he says.

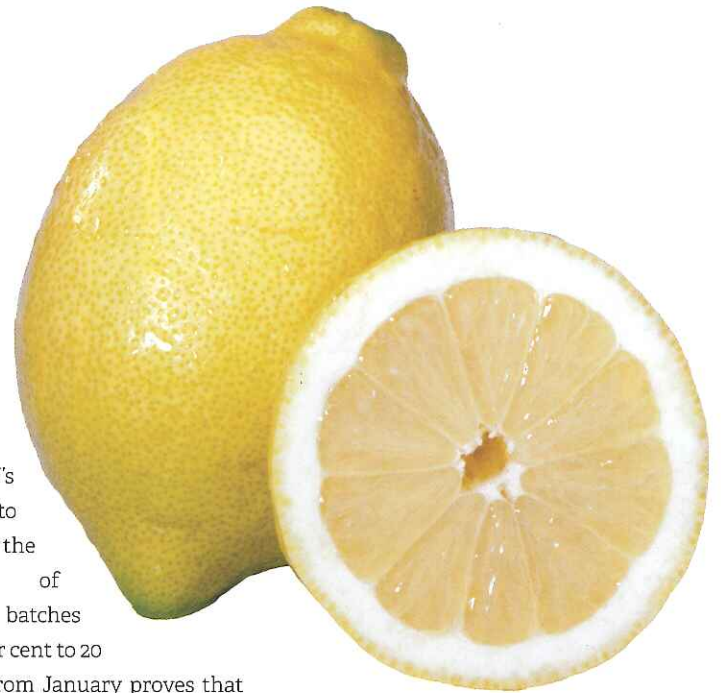
"The EU's decision to increase the frequency of checks on batches from 10 per cent to 20 per cent from January proves that Turkish citrus is deemed to pose a risk to consumers."

He points out that Ailimpo has offered to collaborate with its Turkish counterpart in order to help it improve its monitoring and control systems, since "ultimately, it is in everyone's interest that consumers have total confidence in the product". **G**

GLOBAL REACH

Spanish lemons are sold in more than 80 markets, including 53 outside of the EU. "This reflects the huge interest among exporters to supply potential consumers in any part of the world, regardless of the logistical or phytosanitary challenges involved," says José Antonio García.

ABOVE—Harvests in excess of 300,000 tonnes will be standard in future



FINE END TO FINO CAMPAIGN

Spain concluded its Fino lemon campaign with a production volume of 800,000 tonnes, of which 425,000 tonnes was exported to the European Union, 35,000 tonnes to non-EU markets, 130,000 tonnes was consumed domestically and 210,000 tonnes went for processing.

"These figures show strong growth compared to the 2015/16 season, when Fino output was abnormally low, but in reality it marked a return to normal volumes," García explains.

The start of the season was marred by high stocks of Southern Hemisphere lemons but sales picked up in November and proceeded at a normal pace thereafter.