

Importers are getting ready for Southern Hemisphere citrus season

While the U.S. domestic citrus season is still in full swing, Peru, South Africa, and Chile are gearing up for their seasons. "Everyone is trying to predict what's going to happen in California as that will determine the timing of imports," says Miles Fraser-Jones with Sierra Produce. Early indications are that California's mandarin season will continue until the end of May, perhaps even the first or second week of June, depending on weather conditions. "This timing is fairly normal," Fraser-Jones said. "Last year, California mandarins were still on the shelves in June."

Peru

In the southern hemisphere, Peru has started shipping Primasol, an early Satsuma-type variety. It is a seedless variety, although with a relatively low Brix and acid level. "The danger of bringing in early fruit is that it could back up the market. It all depends on how strong demand is. We don't want to be completely out of fruit, but we also don't want to oversupply the market," commented Fraser-Jones. "Therefore, we've decided to wait shipping Primasol from Peru until next week or the week after." This will result in mid-May arrivals. Primasol and Satsumas are followed by Clemenules, a clementine variety that will start shipping in the next two weeks with fruit arriving towards the end of May.

"While the early citrus fruit from Peru may not offer a superb eating experience, quality of Peruvian citrus significantly improves as the season progresses. By the time the country heads into mandarins, eating quality is very good." In general, Peru is looking at a normal crop year with volumes similar to last season.

South Africa

South Africa is another key citrus supplier to the North American market. The country has experienced good growing conditions, and the trees received enough water. As a result, quality is expected to be better than last year. "Looking at clementines, mandarins, and oranges altogether, it looks to be a normal crop with similar or higher volumes compared to last year." Early varieties of clementines are expected to arrive in the U.S. market the first week of June. About a month later, oranges will arrive and by that time, demand for small oranges is expected to be strong. "This has to do with California having a lot of large-size fruit this year, which is less suitable for bagging and food service."



Chile

Out of Chile, the Chilean Citrus Committee is expecting clementine and mandarin volumes to be down 35 percent. "While the northern part of the country has been affected by drought, it remains to be seen whether production levels will be down that much. From what I am hearing we don't need to be concerned about a lack of mandarin and clementine supply," Fraser-Jones said. Early clementines from Chile's northern production region are expected to be available in the U.S. by the end of May and oranges will make their way in around the end of July.

Competition with California

As long as California is in the market, retailers will prefer to stay with California fruit. "It's very high-quality fruit that the early southern hemisphere fruit simply can't compete with," said Fraser-Jones. Once domestic volumes come down, imports will start on the East Coast and then gradually move to the West. Retailers in the western part of the U.S. will provide California-grown citrus as long as possible for proximity reasons.



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