

Slow Start to 2026 Season Could Lead to Strong Finish

Handlers report that despite the slower-than-typical start to the California avocado season, movement picked up in late spring and it appears that there will be a solid finish with volume meeting the pre-season estimate.

"The pre-season estimate of 330 million pounds still appears to be on track," said Mission Produce Senior Vice President of Global Sourcing Keith Barnard, adding that the California Avocado Commission's mid-season survey results and revised industry estimate should provide a clearer picture of where the crop stands in early July.

Index Fresh Field Manager Keith Blanchard concurred, noting that the GEM variety has performed very impressively this year. "The season started slowly due to less than attractive pricing," he said. "As conditions have improved, growers are increasing harvest to catch up to the typical volumes we would expect at this point in the season. The crop is on track to meet the preseason estimate. This season, GEMs were forecast at an impressive 11 million pounds, a volume never before seen by California growers. As of June 18, the industry had already harvested more than 13 million pounds, and by the time the season wraps at the end of June, GEM volume is likely to



reach a historic 15 million pounds."

He reported that Index Fresh is California's largest marketer of GEMs, and its nationwide promotions of the variety were having a real marketplace impact. "Growing consumer interest in limited time specialty produce varieties, combined with promotable GEM supply, has allowed California Crema GEMs to reach shelves across the country with prominent features in retail circulars," Blanchard said adding that the 15 million pounds were being strategically harvested to align with retail demand and promotion calendars.

Blanchard also said that in the

depressed spring pricing environment, GEMs proved to be a bright spot.

Barnard said that while crop movement started more slowly than it did in 2025 largely due to softer market conditions early in the season, harvest activity for all varieties picked up in April and May, with weekly movement reaching levels comparable to the previous year. June saw peak volume with July and late summer volume expected to experience its typical seasonal decline. "While California fruit is expected to remain available into October, handling timelines typically depend on retail demand, market conditions,

and the pace of the remaining harvest as the season progresses,” he said.

The Mission executive said another bright spot is that there were some additional forays further east this year for California avocados. “Whenever possible, California fruit stays close to home, particularly in the western U.S., where demand is strongest and logistics line up most efficiently,” Barnard said. “This season, some volume has also moved to the East Coast to support customer programs. Export activity has been limited overall, but California fruit has made its way to markets including Canada, Japan, Korea and Taiwan.”

Blanchard and Index Fresh saw similar movement for California fruit. “Export volume has been in a typical range, and Index Fresh refunds the HAB assessment on exported fruit, which makes these opportunities more attractive to our growers,” he said. “We have also been moving California fruit farther east than in a typical season, with a notable increase in volume moving into Texas and the Midwest.”

Another topic of conversation that is of huge interest to the California avocado industry is the potential for El Niño weather conditions later this year. “California growers tend to view El Niño forecasts as a positive sign, since those patterns are often associated with warmer winters and more rainfall,” Barnard said. “Added rain can reduce irrigation demand, support tree health, and build up soil moisture going into the 2027 season. At the same time, the industry anticipates some storm-related challenges, so growers are wise to prepare early — maintaining drainage, monitoring erosion-prone areas, and making sure grove access and irrigation systems are ready before the rainy season sets in.”

Blanchard said growers will continue to combat high temperatures

with adjusted irrigation schedules and careful cultural management practices wherever possible. “Index Fresh’s agronomist, Gerardo Aldunate, works with partner growers across the state on best practices for extreme weather and offers practical, sitespecific solutions to help mitigate the impact,” he said. “Rain is generally welcome in California orchards, within reason, but

severe rain events can create challenges when large amounts fall in a short period of time. New trees planted on berms benefit from improved drainage and grade, so flooding is typically less of an issue; however, growers will still need to address erosion and manage runoff to protect orchard health over the long term.” 🥑

