

By Tim Linden

Good Volume, Great Quality Marks California's 2020 Crop

A solid amount of late fall rain, a limited amount of often-devastating wind and a relatively heavy on-tree crop have handlers anticipating a very good season for California avocado growers.

A compilation of interviews with several handlers in early December indicated a California crop probably in the 370 million pound arena with solid pricing, though probably lower than last year, and excellent quality of fruit peaking in the 48-60 size range. For the most part, handlers expect small quantities of California fruit in January and February, with supplies growing in March and the vast majority of production marketed from April through August.

Rob Wedin, vice president of fresh sales and marketing for Calavo Growers Inc., Santa Paula, CA, noted that his projections forecast a very consistent marketing of the crop in the five-month April through August time frame. He projects 15 to 21 percent of the crop marketed in each of those months, with that period accounting for almost 90 percent of total volume.

While some growers will size pick in January and February and oth-

ers might even strip pick young groves, Wedin said the volume out of California in January will most likely be negligible. He does project that as much as 7 percent of the crop, or about 25 million pounds, could be marketed in February.

Ross Wileman, senior vice president of sales and marketing for Mission Produce Inc., Oxnard, CA, believes that very few pounds of California fruit will be moved during the first two calendar months of 2020. He noted that Mexico has a large crop and tends to dominate the January period with very heavy volumes in the weeks leading up to Super Bowl, which will be held on February 2, 2020. Speaking in early December, he did say the f.o.b. price on avocados was strengthening, though it was much too early to know what the price would be in the January/February time frame for California fruit. The Mission Produce executive said, "We are anticipating lower prices this year for California fruit because of the much larger volume."

Gary Clevenger, managing member and co-founder of Freska Produce International LLC, Oxnard, CA, made that same point about the 2020 grove price for California growers. "We ex-

pect California fruit to continue to get a premium (in the marketplace) but it probably won't be as much as we got last year," he said. "There will be a lot more fruit on the market but hopefully when you combine the average price and the increased volume, growers will still get the gross they need."

Clevenger said it appears the fruit will peak in the 48 to 60 range. He said more fruit on the trees typically means smaller fruit size. However, he said late November and early December rain could have the effect of pushing the size distribution up a bit. It is the larger sizes that command the best pricing so each extra notch in average size materially impacts total returns for the year.

Wedin illustrated that point by noting that in early December, 40-48s of Mexican avocados were returning an f.o.b. at the border of about \$36 per carton while 60s were at about \$26 and 70s were at \$21. It clearly behooves growers to do what they can to increase the size of their fruit.

The Calavo executive said there was a lack of large fruit coming out of Mexico in November and early December, but the size profile was expected to increase in January. But he still an-



anticipated a good market in January on large fruit, so it could be profitable for some California growers to size pick their 2020 crop on the early end of the deal. “With a large crop on the trees, size picking can pencil out,” he said.

Clevenger agreed that for some growers the price will be strong enough at the front end of the deal to justify picking the fruit and getting the tree ready for the following year and the March bloom.

As a practical matter, maturity release dates allowed growers to market fruit that was 48 size or larger starting in mid-December. The entire size spectrum will be released for harvesting by January 16. Wedin said that picking date typically results in some growers stripping their trees and getting their fruit into the pipeline. Though Clevenger said the vast majority of growers typically wait until the fruit sizes and the price potentially increases.

Wedin believes that playing the waiting game into late spring on the price may not be as advantageous for the 2020 season. In 2019, Mexico’s volume started winding down in May and June and there was a solid increase in the market price. “That may not be the case this year,” he said, noting that it ap-

pears that both Mexico and California will have more fruit in the May to July time frame. It probably will be late January before the timing and size of U.S. shipments from Peru will be known but early speculation is that the crop will

also be larger than it was in 2019.

The size of this year’s California crop should allow the industry to take full advantage of the Cinco de Mayo and Fourth of July holiday periods. Both of those holidays offer great promotional opportunities for avocados and this year California fruit should be plentiful for each event.

At the back end of the deal, there is expected to be more fruit than in the last couple of years. Wedin has estimated that about 5 percent of the crop will be marketed in September. Last year’s reduced volume meant very little fruit was available in August and beyond except from the most northern growing region of California. And in 2019, San Luis Obispo County growers were still feeling the results of the 2018 freeze that greatly limited their 2019 crop. This year, more late volume is expected from that region. 🥑

**BROKAW
NURSERY**

Premium Avocado Trees
On Clonal Rootstock

Dusa®
Toro Canyon
Duke 7
Borchard
GEM™
Carmen®

BROKAW NURSERY LLC.
5501 Elizabeth Road, Ventura, CA 93004
Tel. (805) 647-2262 Fax. (805) 671-9738
Serving CA farmers' nursery stock needs since 1956

www.brokawnursery.com