

By Tim Linden

## Spring to Offer Opportunities for California Fruit

A trio of California-based handlers agreed that the sweet spot for the marketing of California avocados in 2024 will most likely occur during the April/May time frame with some opportunities available in late winter and early June as well.

Speaking to *From the Grove* in separate interviews during the first week of January, Patrick Lucy of Del Rey Avocado, Gahl Crane of Eco Farms Avocados and Peter Shore of Calavo Growers agreed that with California's 2024 crop being on the low end of its volume curve, the fruit will most likely be sold in a tight window as Mexico's crop decreases in volume throughout the spring months.

"I don't expect to see much volume from California for a couple of months," said Lucy on January 3, "but of course it depends on Mother Nature."

He said the fruit on the trees is starting to size but currently the size curve is also on the low end of the spectrum. "Right now, we have a stable market, so unless the market goes crazy, I expect most growers to wait a bit before they start picking."

Lucy said it appears Mexico has a lighter crop this year than last year so volume from that point of origin should start to decline after the tremendous shipments that typically come in January and early February to accommodate the football playoff weekend



promotions. He noted that with the Big Game slated for February 11, which is a bit later than usual, retailers will have an extra week to promote the always popular fruit for the "Big Game" weekend. With Mexican imports projected to approach 400 million pounds during the first six weeks of the calendar year, that country could see a bigger decline in fruit earlier this year than last year. "We expect that Mexico is going to be lighter than last year on 40s and larger as the season wears on," he said, noting that March, April and May appear to be ripe for California avocado sales.

During this early January conversation, the rain was falling at the Del Rey office in Fallbrook, which Lucy said is a good sign for growers. "If we

can get some warm weather in March and April, we could get a very good set for next year."

Lucy reminded that it was an extended period of gloom and mist in March and April of 2023 that contributed to the low crop volume for 2024.

Crane agreed that very little California fruit will be marketed before late February. "There is not a need in the marketplace and the size isn't there yet," he said on January 4. "We expect it will be late February or early March before we see much California fruit, but the weather will be a factor in the timing."

He said significant rain during the next few months, as is forecast, will be good for both the 2024 and 2025 crops,

but it also can reduce the number of harvest days and push the crop back a bit. Crane said Eco Farms is expecting the 2024 crop to produce between 200 and 220 million pounds of fruit.

“Mexico is expected to have a little bit less fruit this year so we expect April/May and into June to be a good window for California,” Crane said.

He added that early reports from Peru indicate that the regions with early fruit will have a lighter crop than in 2023. “We do not think Peru will be a factor until June,” he said. “And even then, a high percentage of their shipments will be to the East Coast with their peak in July and August.”

Crane reasoned that it was still a bit early in early January to predict the best window for California growers. He said the Big Game promotion period extends beyond the actual date of the Big Game, but rather encompasses all of the January and February football playoff weekends. He noted that early January demand was very good even with heavy supplies. Crane said an assessment of what Mexico has left in mid-February will help to inform California growers as to their best marketing window.

He said the marketing situation is also changing a bit from the traditional program as more and more retailers are promoting 60-size fruit to create good promotable price points attractive to consumers. This trend is creating a larger array of fruit sizes in good demand. Crane said this is a good thing for growers as it allows them to get a good return on the many different sizes of fruit a grove typically yields.

He added that the trend toward bagged fruit, which typically features even smaller fruit, continues on its upward trajectory, which also helps growers and their packers utilize the entire tree’s output.

Shore of Calavo was the final handler interviewed and his comments



echoed those of the other two. “We’ll see what happens in January, but we don’t expect to see much California fruit this month,” he said on January 4.

He added that while the oil content release date for 60s and larger fruit occurred in early January with the release date for all fruit slated for January 16, there won’t be much on the market until late February or early March. He noted that most fruit had not sized yet and the market opportunity isn’t there either. “We expect some decent volume in March with the peak coming in April and May and into June,” Shore said, adding that there should be California fruit in July and August but at a much lower volume level than most years.

He agreed that California’s marketing window will very much revolve around the movement of Mexico’s fruit over the next couple of months. Heading into the very heavy

January/February time frame, he said Mexico has marketed about half of its projected volume during the first half of its marketing year. If volume is as heavy as projected over the next two months, Shore said volume should drop off in spring allowing opportunities for California and other points of origin. He did agree that Peru is expected to ship fewer avocados than last year to the U.S. market in April and May because of their light early crop.

“Right now, we are seeing good volumes, good promotions and a pretty good market,” said Shore of the U.S. market, adding that a solid world market also bodes well for California avocados this spring and summer. “We are seeing a very strong European avocado market because of lighter supplies from Spain and Morocco this season,” he concluded. 🥑