

Elle Aggeletos - Venus Citrus

Cara Caras the standout for SA citrus producer

After a delayed start caused by wet weather, the Australian citrus season has hit its stride, with excellent internal fruit quality and strong export demand giving growers plenty of confidence. Elle Aggeletos of Venus Citrus says the season has shifted later than usual, but the wait has been worthwhile.

"We had quite a late season this year," Aggeletos says. "Normally we'd be underway around April or May, but we didn't really get going until the end of May or June, and we'll probably run right through to December."



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The slow start was driven by persistent wet conditions that made harvesting difficult.

"It was very wet at the beginning of the season, so it made it hard for growers to harvest," she says. "If the fruit is wet, or the temperature is below 15 degrees, you can't pick because it can leave marks on the fruit. We don't want that."

Fortunately, the disruption was relatively short-lived, allowing the harvest to simply move back rather than requiring growers to rush picking.

"The weather wasn't bad for a long period of time, so we were able to shift everything back a little," Aggeletos says. "That actually worked in our favour because other growing regions had already finished harvesting, so their fruit was coming off the market as ours was arriving."

Now, she says, the crop is performing exceptionally well across almost every variety. "Our blood oranges haven't been harvested yet, but they're still on the trees looking amazing," she says. "Internally they taste great, and everything looks really good."

The standout performers, however, have been the Cara Cara oranges.



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"They're probably the highlight of this season," Aggeletos says. "Pretty much everything about them is near perfect. They taste fantastic, they look great internally, and the quality has been amazing. We've been really happy with them."

Other citrus varieties have also delivered. "Our navels have been consistently good as always," she says. "The mandarins have had really good size, great flavour and excellent quality, and we're finding it quite easy to sell everything."

Export markets continue to play an important role, with Venus Citrus shipping fruit to destinations across North America and Asia.

"We've been sending a lot of fruit to the USA," Aggeletos says. "We're also exporting to China, Canada, Japan, Korea and a number of other countries, which has been great."

As ever, different markets have favoured different varieties. "Asia generally leans towards sweeter fruit," she says. "The USA enjoys blood oranges and is happy to take a wide range of varieties, so we don't really have too many issues finding the right home for different products."

That flexibility helps spread risk across multiple markets. "If we know one country really wants a particular variety, we'll focus on supplying that market rather than trying to push it somewhere that doesn't have the same demand."



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That helps when one export market has proven more difficult this year.

"We had plans to expand further into the UAE, but shipping disruptions made that quite challenging," Aggeletos says. "Things have improved now, and we're sending fruit again, although not in the volumes we originally intended."

Domestically, the effects of the weather and the difficulties that ensued from the unpredictable climate have pushed pricing to become more competitive.

"In Australia we've seen prices soften a little, so we've adjusted where necessary to remain competitive," she says. "Our premium fruit has held its value though, and demand for that has remained very strong. We want our growers to receive

the returns they deserve because they're the ones who put all the work into producing the fruit."

With favourable weather now prevailing and high-quality fruit continuing to come off the trees, she expects the remainder of the season to finish strongly.



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"Everything's looking really good now," she says. "The fruit has great size, excellent internal quality and the weather has finally come right, so we're looking forward to a really good finish to the season."

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