

Clementines under pressure

South African citrus competing with Chilean fruit

The South African soft citrus season started early this year – beginning in early June rather than its usual July 4th start and supply has been good for clementines. “We’ve had really good supply from early June,” said Marc Solomon from Capespan North America. “The season is now tapering off for the regular varieties. It’s gone really well; the volume’s up and quality has been really good. There’s still fruit in the market but arrivals are tapering off.”



Competition from South American soft citrus has created pressure on imports. “There’s a lot of Chilean soft citrus in the market. Their volume is up significantly and there’s also fruit in the market from Uruguay,” said Solomon. “There’s definitely more than enough fruit in the marketplace.” He anticipates pressure will be put on prices until August. “In August we’ll get into the later varieties - murcotts. Then we expect the market to improve.”

Movement has been very positive with growth in the market, Solomon says especially from domestic production of soft citrus. “We’re definitely seeing a growth in demand which we believe has got a lot to do with California’s strong domestic consumer awareness and consumer acceptance for the Halos and the Cuties (brands). We’re definitely seeing more demand for imported soft citrus.”

Navel season is also starting – South African navels started within the last couple of weeks. Movement is slow but retailers are switching from domestic to import, which will increase demand. “Probably about 1/3 of our customers have switched as of this week to imported navels,” Solomon noted. “By the first of August we anticipate most or all of our clients will have finished the Californian supply and be on South African navels.”

Although not a new variety, the lesser-known Cara cara navels seem to be doing well. They’ve been available for two weeks now and will continue through August. Another item Solomon says is gaining popularity is star ruby grapefruit. “We’ve had them through June and July and the season goes through September. It’s a really good quality piece of fruit. Traditionally it hasn’t come to the US but for the last few years it has been coming and doing very well.” Fruit quality and colour continues to make South African’s citrus look like “It’s looking like an exceptionally good season.”

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Publication date: 7/26/2016
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