

GLOBAL CITRUS SCAN (37)

John Edmonds (3 October 2014)



Citrus Growers Association (CGA)

Better prospects for Israeli melon, citrus exports

Following last year's lacklustre returns, this year's Israeli export season for melons and citrus has gotten off to a good start. With the European market relatively free of large amounts of fruit from South Africa, prices for melons and grapefruit have been strong...Similarly; the market for red grapefruit is very good. A summer glut of product from South Africa made for low prices. The market got so depressed that many South African suppliers cut their grapefruit programs short, but the subsequent lack of fruit resuscitated the market. Now, with the Israeli season underway, suppliers like BeFresh are benefiting from a robust market. "Supplies from Turkey and Florida will arrive in the next two or three weeks, and then prices will go down," said Ziv. "... A box of grapefruit is now selling for about 14 Euro, and it might go down a bit in the next few weeks, but I don't think it will be as low as the price we saw last season." The market for pomelos was also relatively successful, though it was relegated to niche status because of the large presence of Chinese pomelos. Shipments of sweeties began this week, and like the other Israeli citrus programs, it's gotten off to a good start..."Sweeties have no competition in Europe because they're only grown in Israel," said Ziv. "It's only the first week of the season, but we've gotten good performance from sweeties because there's a balance in demand and supplies."...

[www.freshplaza.com; 2 October 2014]

Can GMOs Save Our Oranges?

The story of how the Cavendish replaced the Gros Michel as the world's top banana (literally) has now reached the status of a fable on the dangers of monoculture. As the story goes, in the olden days, creamy, delicious Gros Michel bananas were grown as clones of each other and ported to U.S. grocery stores from huge plantations in the Caribbean and Central America. That is, until a nasty fungi called Panama disease spread like wildfire through all those genetically identical, uniquely vulnerable bananas—nearly wiping out the Gros Michel as a species and forcing U.S. grocery stores to start selling smaller, blander Cavendish bananas instead. Fast-forward to 2014, and we've got the same situation—only this time, instead of bananas, it's oranges and rubber trees. Since 2005, the U.S. orange crop has been crippled by a disease called "citrus greening," which sours oranges; Brazilian rubber trees, meanwhile, have been hit by a fungus that renders them unusable. We would be headed for another monoculture wipeout, but, luckily, scientists today have weapons they didn't have 60 years ago... genetically modified organisms, or GMOs. GMOs are despised for a number of reasons. Some are factually based (increasing pesticide resistance in GMOs does indeed increase pesticide use); others are just phobic (a piece of corn with fish genes in it won't taste like fish). But despite concerns over "Frankenfood," it is genetic modification that'll keep us flush with oranges and rubber in the near future—if anything does. Things are going well for rubber, relatively speaking. A species of flowering plant called the Kazakh dandelion produces high-quality rubber at its roots; it's on the short list of potential replacements for the fragile, notoriously finicky rubber trees as a worldwide rubber source. Geneticists have bred the Kazakh to grow up to a full foot tall, producing quite a lot of rubber at the root—about on par, per acre, with the most productive rubber plantations in Asia. Genetic engineers have also bred these rubber-producing Kazakh dandelions to grow their leaves upward instead of flat so harvesting machines have something to hook onto when pulling the crop out of the ground (the resulting plant is an enormous dandelion with leaves sticking straight out of the ground, upward and slightly to the side of the stem—it looks like a cartoon plant). Despite anti-GMO suspicion, resistance by consumers is surprisingly scant; perhaps people simply don't care what's put in their tires. For oranges, the situation's hazier. In 2013, Ricke Kress, president of Southern Gardens Citrus (a conglomerate that owns 2.5 million orange trees and a factory that squeezes juice for Tropicana and Florida's Natural) started investigating three particular breeds of genetically modified oranges that could withstand citrus greening—one with genes from a pig, one with a synthetic genome and one with genes from spinach. The "pig" and "synthetic" oranges were eventually rejected: Though nearly identical to unmodified oranges, consumers were turned off by the "creep factor." Even the "spinach oranges" prompted suspicion; The New York Times reports that Erik Mirkov, the inventor of the "spinach oranges," was bombarded with questions like "Will my juice taste like spinach?" and "Will it be green?" Kress himself is frustrated by this ignorance, and for good reason: If his or someone else's varieties don't take hold, Florida's orange crop is as doomed as the Gros Michel banana.

[newsweek.com; 2 October 2014]

UN expert panel to address EU-South Africa CBS dispute

In an effort to put an end to the long-running dispute between South African citrus industry and the EU, the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) will put together a panel of experts to scrutinize the issue. The dispute relates to various instances of the fungal disease citrus black spot (CBS) being detected on South African shipments to the EU, which led to Europe imposing strict measures on the country's growers...The IPPC, which is part of the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), has requested the nomination of disinterested experts who have a scientific background on CBS to become committee members. Even though the IPPC does not have binding powers, it is hoped the panel could bring some degree of finality to the dispute which has been ongoing since 2010. The IPPC was formed to guard against the transmission of plant diseases and enhance trade by ensuring there were no unjustified barriers between trade partners...

[www.freshfruitportal.com; 30 September 2014]

If you need more information on any of these issues, or if there is anything else that CGA can assist with, please contact us at 031 7652514, or johne@cga.co.za

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