GLOBAL CITRUS SCAN (2016_5)

John Edmonds (12 February 2016) Citrus Growers Association (CGA)

California's mandarin boom

Since the expansion of groves began in the late 1990s, California's mandarin plantings have increased tenfold, and the state now harvests 92 percent of the nation's mandarin orange crop; thanks to new offerings and deft marketing, mandarins have become a fixture in the American fruit bowl. While California's harvest has increased, Florida, troubled by citrus greening disease and obsolete varieties with seeds, has had its share drop to 8 percent, from 66 percent. The U.S's consumption of mandarins has doubled, to 5 pounds a year for every American, while orange sales have declined. Several forces converged to ignite the California mandarin boom. Consumers increasingly demanded convenient, easy-to-eat fruits like blueberries and seedless grapes. In the 1970s, Spain started exporting clementines — seedless and easy to peel, with excellent flavor — to the Eastern United States, and that trade increased significantly after a devastating California citrus freeze in 1990…

In the late 1990s, two companies with deep pockets and marketing savvy, Sun Pacific and Paramount Citrus (now Wonderful Citrus), gambled big with huge mandarin plantings on the Maricopa Highway, 25 miles southwest of Bakersfield, where they were isolated from other citrus whose pollen could make the fruit seedy. The bet paid off spectacularly. Mandarins from the two companies, sold as Cuties and Halos, now dominate the U.S. market; these and a few other brands of reasonably priced, seedless and easy-peeling fruit have become a staple…The supremacy of the two big companies and two mandarin types has forced medium and smaller growers to think outside the Cuties and Halos box — to exploit seasonal and regional niches, and to market distinctive premium varieties. As for the future, the mandarin boom may be peaking. Most major growers feel that the market is getting saturated, and that California plantings will soon stabilize. But whatever happens, mandarins have arrived, and now is the time to try them.

[Seattletimes.com; 10 February 2016]

USDA awards US$20.1M in grants to fight citrus greening disease

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has awarded US$20.1 million in grants to help citrus producers in the fight against Huanglongbing (citrus greening disease)."Citrus greening has affected more than 75 percent of Florida citrus crops and threatens production all across the United States," says U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack…The funding is available to university researchers through the Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI) Citrus Disease Research and Extension Program (CDRE). The SCRI program has been addressing the critical needs of the specialty crop industry since its inception in 2014 and has granted $43.6 million to combat the destructive disease which was first detected in Florida in 2005. It has also been detected in Georgia, Louisiana, South Carolina and Texas as well as Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and 14 states in Mexico. A total of 15 U.S. states or territories are under full or partial quarantine due to the detected presence of the Asian citrus psyllid, a vector for citrus greening disease…Various research studies continue at the University of Florida and Washington State University focusing on growing the putative pathogenic bacterium in artificial culture to help manage the disease. Another project at the University of Florida will develop morpholino-based bactericides to reduce pathogen transmission and eliminate infections in existing trees.

[Freshfruitportal.com; 10 February 2016]

Mixed February Florida citrus forecast

The February forecast for this season's Florida citrus crop remained steady for oranges and dipped slightly for grapefruit, according to the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) of the US Department of Agriculture (USDA). The report estimates a 69m-box season for Florida oranges, a number consistent with predictions over each of the last two months. The current forecast represents a 29 per cent decrease compared with last season. Florida Grapefruit is estimated to decrease to 10.5m boxes from January's 10.8m boxes. "The consistency in today's forecast is certainly an encouraging note for the industry and the consumers who count on us. Our growers across the state continue their heroic work to produce Florida's signature crop, even as citrus greening continues to threaten our groves," said Shannon Shepp, executive director of the Florida Department of Citrus.

[Fruitnet.com; 10 February 2016]

Stories from Fruit Logistica

A sunnier political outlook in Argentina regrettably does not extend to this season's lemon forecast: with El Niño bringing heavier rainfall than usual, producers are on high alert for quality issues, but there is optimism that an earlier end to Spanish production will leave more space for the new crop.

[Fruitnet.com; 9 February 2016]