


With the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) [proposing to open up access for Uruguayan citrus](#), the South American country hopes to send its first mandarins to the U.S. East Coast in 2014, with the possibility of a test trial later this year. For Marta Bentancur Servetti from the Union of Fruit and Vegetable Growers and Exporters (UPEFRUY) international department, the news is positive but there are still many steps to be taken to ensure a successful market entry. 

Bentancur says the Uruguayan citrus industry is very happy with the interest shown by U.S. importers and a partnership strategy is currently under negotiations.

"It is still not totally defined but there have been various advances; there have been meetings, and what is defined is the quality controls for the fruit leaving and on arrival, which will be done in conjunction," she says.

"For us it's a very appreciated destination that for many years we have fought to reach; a high quality fruit market where we have a window of a few months to enter when we don't compete with American fruit - from California or Florida - and we will be able to compete with exporters from the Southern Hemisphere.

The Uruguayan citrus season runs from late March and April through to September.

"We will try to get a consensus among exporters to have an ordered slow entry with a bit of fruit, and learn along the way so we don't injure other growers - South Africa for example - as that would impact us too with lower prices."

She says Uruguay will mostly send mandarins to the U.S. East Coast, primarily of the clementine variety, along with some oranges. With the procedures needed to finally gain access, Bentancur expects the first exports in the 2014 season but believes a late trial in 2013 is possible.

She says her country will be able to compete in a more "egalitarian way" with other suppliers in the U.S., compared to its top market the European Union where it is hampered by trade barriers.

"Basically in the European Union we have a handicap which is an entry tariff for mandarins, at around 12%, while our competitors like South Africa, Chile and Peru have 0%. From this perspective it's not good for competitiveness.

"At the moment, maritime freight costs are rising and it's a threat to the sector that also has rising internal costs, above all labor costs, transport and energy. But freight to the United

States will be the same or less,

"For us Europe is the main traditional market but now some other markets are growing too, mainly Brazil but also a bit in Asia."

She says this season will likely yield a larger citrus export crop than last year's of more than 90,000 metric tons (MT), when frosts damaged orchards and growers were forced to replant in many cases.

"I think it should be said, that in Uruguay more than increasing exports, we know that we have to work towards differentiating ourselves based on quality and trust; that's more important than volume because if we enter with huge volumes we won't have a market."

She adds UPEFRUY hopes to collaborate with competing suppliers to some extent to ensure a stable market.

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