

Like their neighbors across the border in Chile, growers in Argentina's Mendoza province have suffered damages from recent frosts, particularly those with grape, peach, apricot, plum and almond farms. 

While the full effects have not yet been calculated, the initial outlook is not encouraging with the industry expecting serious consequences.

"We have had frosts in the whole province of Mendoza, but the most affected areas are the Uco Valley, and the south in the zones of San Rafael and [General] Alvear, which have a greater surface area of stonefruit," explained Marcos Scipioni, director of the Directorate Agriculture and Climate Contingency.

The Uco Valley has registered significant losses for fruit crops, especially for plums and almonds, while Red Globe table grapes have been significantly affected in San Martin.

He said that growers had a determined period to contact his directorate to make claims about the effects of frosts on their farms.

"From there we start official assessments property by property, inspecting every crop, variety and species. We are not doing that currently as we are in the stage of receiving denunciations - there are already close to 2,000.

He said that preliminary inspections had shown apricots were the most damaged fruit crop in Mendoza, with approximate losses of 80%.

"After that is almonds, reaching 100% in some cases, but in general the percentage loss is between 70-80%. Peaches, both industrial and for fresh consumption, are 70% damaged.

"This changes with the varieties - there are some later ones that are fully in tact, but the frosts put the majority of varieties in a very sensitive state, with plums also presenting relative damages of 70%.

"80% in this period means that eight out of 10 flowers were burnt or damaged by frosts, which means 80% of the harvest."

He said the problem was not just that the cold temperatures occurred, but that they were constant at -4°C (24.8°F) to -6°C (21.2°F) for six hours; a situation that plants could not resist.

"Now we have predicted an increase in temperatures for the whole week. On Thursday we

could have cold but it won't be major, so this week we will have good weather. The last frost was on Sunday, which affected the province's southern zone with temperatures around -4°C (24.8°F).

"Because of this, we'll have to return to revise the damages mentioned, to see if this frost added cases."

He emphasized that the directorate had trained growers during winter, giving talks about active and passive measures that could be taken to reduce damages.

Active measures include burning fuels with burners designed for frosts and using sprinkler systems, while passive defense measures include soil management methods such as cleaning weeds so that sun enters the soil well during the day, maintaining moisture, making "forest curtains" as barriers and designing farms with the entry of cold air in mind; all palliative measures that cannot do much alone against severe frosts.

Additionally, growers in the province of San Juan to the north of Mendoza have also registered significant losses, particularly for early grapes destined for fresh consumption.

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